# TWO AMERICAN BOYS WITH PERSHING IN FRANCE

MAJOR SHERMAN CROCKETT

VC 400

They hastened to take hold and get the woman safely out.

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# TWO AMERICAN BOYS WITH PERSHING IN FRANCE

By St. George Rathborne,

AUTHOR OF "TWO AMERICAN BOYS WITH THE ALLIED ARMIES," "TWO AMERICAN BOYS WITH THE DARDANELLES BATTLE FLEET," "TWO AMERICAN BOYS IN THE FRENCH WAR TRENCHES," "TWO AMERICAN BOYS ABOARD A SUBMERSIBLE," ETC.

*ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES L. WRENN*

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# Two American Boys With Pershing in France

## CHAPTER I

### THE TENTED FIELD OF PERSHING'S BOYS

"Amos, it would be hard to imagine a more thrilling sight than these khaki-colored tents—and Old Glory fluttering over the camp! Remembering, too, that we see this in France, back of the firing-line, and not in the U. S. A. That's the inspiring part of it to me, Jack."

"How it does make my heart glow to see all those thousands of clean-limbed athletic soldier boys moving about! They're throwing themselves heart and soul into learning up-to-date trench warfare under the skillful guidance of French instructors."

"Whew! what a ripping reception they got, Jack, when they landed. I'll certainly never forget what I saw there. Why, the people went fairly *crazy* over them!"

"Can you blame them, Amos, when you stop to think what the sight meant to poor, staggering, war-weary France, the most gallant nation on the face of the whole earth to-day? Hundreds of thousands of her valiant sons have been lost, but never once has she faltered. Finally when they have their backs to the wall, determined to die as a nation, but never surrender again to the barbarian invader of their borders, they suddenly see a great fleet of strange transports come into the harbor. From these debark Pershing's brave boys in khaki, bronzed from their long campaign across the hot deserts of Mexico, and eager to send the German foe reeling back to his own country. Oh, that was surely enough to set the French people wild with joy!"

"Lucky fellows that we are, to see it all, Jack!"

"That old paper signed by Lord Kitchener still worked like a charm with the people in London, and they did all they could to help us to cross the channel."

"You're right, Jack; but after landing all our

efforts to get to the front were useless for days. A thousand things conspired to hold us up. I honestly believe we would still be in Paris only for that bright thought of yours."

"Well, I chanced to remember that my Uncle Dan once told us he had known Major General John Pershing when they were young men together; in fact, they had been a bit like chums. That gave me something to build on; and sure enough it worked splendidly when we found a way to try it out."

"I'll never forget, Jack, how we finally managed to get to see General Pershing when he came to Paris. He showed a deep interest in the errand of mercy that has brought us across the sea for a second visit to warring France. How he made us relate all of our lively adventures in Belgium and France on that never-to-be-forgotten occasion!"

"Even how we saw the bombardment of the Dardanelles Turkish forts by the Allied battleship fleet, eh, Amos?"

"And last, but far from least, Jack, how by a

wonderful streak of good fortune when we were on a Turkish transport, prisoners at the time, in the Sea of Marmora, bound for Constantinople, it was sunk by a British submersible that had crept in through the narrow straits, defying all the set mines. Also the way they took us aboard, and allowed us to witness the bombardment of the docks and bridges of the city on the Golden Horn."

"You mustn't forget, Amos, that after doing all this damage for days in Marmora, the submersible once more ran the gantlet of the Bosphorus, slipping past the forts and mines, well under the surface, and so rejoined the British fleet outside."

"Well, anyway, General Pershing told us he was mighty proud of two young Americans who could do a few things like that. He also promised to say a good word for us to the French military authorities that might help us along. It was slow in coming, because they have such oceans of things to look after; but in the end we received a paper that allowed us to proceed here to the

new training camp made ready for the first American expeditionary force. It's near enough to the front for us to occasionally hear a faint rumble that we know is caused by the big guns growling at the Germans up toward the north.

"But we've been here for days now," continued the young fellow who answered to the name of Jack, "and all we've been able to learn is that the fine old Villefue Chateau, for which we are bound, lies over back of No Man's Land, where the enemy guns still dominate the country, and it's dangerous for any one to roam. Sometimes I begin to think we've surely come across this time on a fool's errand, Amos."

"Hold on there, Jack! Remember how often we fought against that same kind of fear when we were hunting all over Europe for my brother Frank, who had enlisted in the aviation corps under the name of Bradford. Didn't we chase him like a regular will-o'-the-wisp here, there, and everywhere, to finally run across him among the Australians who were fighting like tigers on Gallipoli? We'll find little Pauline Winters by

hook or crook, if she's still alive. American pluck and that never-say-die spirit wins the game nine cases out of ten."

That sort of cheery talk seemed to arouse Amos. He thrust out his hand for a shake, and nodded his head as he smiled once more.

"Excuse me for showing a sign of the white feather, will you, Jack?" he hastened to say, once more resuming his customary resolute demeanor. "It isn't very often that I weaken. I only hope there isn't a little streak of yellow in my make-up, that's all."

"No danger of that, let me tell you," laughed the other. "Your father was Colonel Turner, once a friend of Kitchener, before the Britisher became quite so famous. Many people have said you are a chip of the old block, Amos. Let's hope we get a chance to take a look-in at that old chateau where Pauline's aged French grandmother lives. I'm afraid, though, it'll only be a heap of ruins by this time, because it lies between the hostile lines, and must have been shelled many times."

"We'll never go back home until we know the fate of the little girl, Jack. I couldn't face that poor, sorrowing mother, and tell her how, after getting close to the place, the danger was so great we didn't dare go any nearer. We're bound to find Pauline Winters, if she's still in the land of the living, or know the reason why."

Somehow, this seemed to start both boys into a train of serious thought, for they stood there on the slight elevation overlooking the great camp of the American Expeditionary Forces, and a faraway expression crept over their bronzed, resolute faces. No doubt, memory was carrying them across the rolling deep to the land they loved. Once more they saw the home-folks gathered about the supper-table, talking almost wholly about those who had gone forth, bent on an errand of mercy, and ready to risk all sorts of danger for the sake of bringing peace to the overwrought heart of a distracted mother.

They were full cousins, these two lads, Jack Maxfield and Amos Turner. Very likely no American boys ever met with more remarkable

adventures than had fallen to their lot a few years before, when they visited Europe. The Great War was then in full blast, with the German legions overrunning Belgium and Northern France, and the Allied Powers striking back at the invaders, grimly determined once for all to end this menace of might overruling right.

It would be impossible to give in these pages even an outline of these wonderful happenings at which Jack and Amos have hinted during their talk. Besides, there are really too many stirring events awaiting our attention to spare time and space in relating past episodes. If the reader is interested, and would know the details, he can easily learn all about those thrilling adventures by procuring the previous volumes, in which they have been duly chronicled.

After accomplishing their mission, which was to find and send Frank Turner home, so that his father could ask his forgiveness before he died, on account of having believed him guilty of a theft he did not commit, the two cousins had gone back to the ordinary school life that was

the portion of all boys of their age in peaceful America.

It was very hard for them to try and put out of their minds all those amazing things they had witnessed, and even had a part in, while on the other side of the broad ocean. But as the months passed these memories were mellowed by age until often the cousins were half inclined to look upon them as a dream, they were so hard to believe, 'mid the peaceful scenes that surrounded them, of the other half of the civilized world being drenched in blood, with a dozen nations grappling in the most terrible war ever known.

Then events began to move more swiftly. A state of war was declared to exist between the United States and the Imperial Government of Germany. Mobilization fever seized upon the whole country, and Uncle Sam began to strip for the gigantic task that confronted him—of closing with the savage beast that was loose in the world, and bringing him to the earth in such a positive defeat as would make future wars impossible.

It was well along in the month of June, when a sudden emergency arose that again aroused the slumbering spirit of adventure in the breasts of the two boys. A second cousin of Jack's mother, a widow named Mrs. Winters, visited them in their home. She was in great distress, and suffering very much in mind and body. When they learned what the cause of all this was Jack and Amos immediately found themselves seized with a burning desire to try and bring some comfort to the poor lady's mind; for she passed many sleepless nights worrying over the fate of one most dear, and who by a strange fatality chanced to be exposed to all the horrible perils of modern warfare.

She had several children, but her youngest, pretty little Pauline, had been taken over to France to visit her old and feeble grandmother, who lived in a great chateau in the northern section of the beautiful country, and was said to be immensely wealthy.

Mrs. Winters was French by birth, though she had married an American connected at the time

with the legation in Paris. As she suffered frightfully from seasickness, and her physician had positively warned her never to again venture on the ocean, she could not go abroad herself. The grandmother had urged that her namesake whom she had also made her heiress, be sent over to stay a year with her in the chateau before she died, and to this arrangement the mother had finally, though reluctantly, consented.

Then suddenly came the terrible war, and it was impossible for the child to come back to the mother who grieved for her. Mails were infrequent, and as time went on, with the Germans constantly becoming more and more severe in their treatment of those French inhabitants whom the fortunes of war had thrown into their hands, the torture of the poor lady far away in America became more intense, until she was almost out of her mind. She pictured all sorts of calamities for the little girl of her heart. If she could have gone, and were allowed to sail, she would long since have taken her life in her hand and departed.

Jack heard her weep until his boyish heart could stand it no longer. So he consulted with his cousin and chum. They debated the matter gravely, and then arrived at the conclusion that once more it was their duty to offer their services to help one who was in such sore distress.

Their former experience on the fighting line would be of great assistance to them, they believed; and there was at least a fair chance of their succeeding in finding and saving the lost little Pauline.

The natural objections of their folks had to succumb when the mourning mother begged them to allow the brave boys to go forth. So they had taken passage on a steamer bound for a port in Great Britain. The perils of the submarine zone had been successfully passed, and eventually they landed in France, just in time to witness that glorious spectacle of the coming into harbor of the flotilla of transports bearing the first expeditionary army which valiant Pershing was to lead against the detested enemy of humanity on the battlefields of Northern France.

Their brief conversation has already informed the reader as to how they came to finally reach the training camp miles behind the front, and the location of which was for various reasons being kept as much of a secret as possible.

Having thus briefly explained just why these two American boys chanced to be over in war-stricken France at this critical period we can once more pick up the thread of our narrative, and proceed to stirring scenes that await the telling.

The day was not far from its close. It had been fairly warm, and the setting of the sun might be expected as usual to bring with it a cooling breeze that would be very welcome. Then, later on, the almost full moon would look down on those myriad of khaki-colored tents, amidst which thousands of Uncle Sam's boys sat at their evening meal, and talked of the land across the sea where mothers, sisters, wives and sweethearts were going about their customary duties with heavy hearts, it might be, on account of the absent ones.

It was about this time that Amos noticed his chum staring fixedly up toward the heavens, across which here and there fleecy clouds were drifting.

"What interests you up yonder, Jack?" he went on to ask carelessly. "I hope you don't imagine you see one of those Zeppelins sailing this way?"

"No," the other quickly replied, "but I've just picked up a plane that is heading this way, far up among the clouds; and somehow I seem to notice an unusual excitement in the French aviation corps, as though they suspected it might be a German pilot bent on discovering the exact location of Pershing's American camp."

## CHAPTER II

### A SUN MESSAGE

Amos showed immediate interest when his chum made such a thrilling announcement. It chanced to be a subject that the two boys had talked over frequently; for they guessed that the German high command must be more than ordinarily curious to ascertain how much truth there could be in the rumors that had reached the battle lines concerning the coming of a large American Expeditionary Force.

The first thing Amos did was to reach around and unsling the binoculars which were strapped over his shoulder. These he hurriedly adjusted and trained upward.

Long service had made him an expert in locating objects, so that he quickly covered the small speck which had by accident caught Jack's "eagle eye."

"It's an airplane, all right!" he at once declared, "and flying at an enormous height. No anti-aircraft gun can deluge that chap with shrapnel."

"How about the make of the machine, Amos?" asked the other eagerly. "You ought to be able to tell a Boche airplane even at such a distance; it happens to be very bright up close to those fleecy white clouds against which it's outlined."

"Well, if my judgment is worth anything, Jack, I'd say that was a German plane, all right. Here, take a squint for yourself, and see."

Almost immediately Jack exclaimed in growing excitement:

"Sure thing, Amos! At last they've managed to locate the American training camp, and those chaps up yonder with their glass can even see Old Glory flying over the tents. If they were in doubt before, they need be so no longer. Hindenburg will know that America has arrived back of the fighting lines, to get ready to take a place and do her appointed part in the work of saving democracy for the world."

"Whoop! there they go up to take a look-in with the stranger!" ejaculated Amos.

Several airplanes seemed to suddenly spring from the ground and mount upward in speedy spirals, that promised to take them a mile high in a very brief space of time, such was the powerful nature of their motors, and the wonderful manner in which the up-to-date aviator was able to annihilate space.

They were French machines, manned by some of those daring pilots who had won immortal fame in their profession, so that some of them already had a gruesome record of from a dozen to a score of victories to their credit. This meant that on each occasion they had managed to shoot down an opposing aviator, and send him through space to his death far, far below.

The two boys, immensely thrilled, stood there and watched passing events. From one to the other the binoculars passed, and comment was naturally of a character to correspond to the intensely interesting nature of the happening.

"There, you can see that the Boche has

swerved now, and is making off in a big hurry," said Amos, when it came his turn to use the powerful glasses.

"Just what I expected," Jack went on to say. "He's accomplished his purpose, and doesn't hanker after having a rumpus with those eager Frenchmen. They're jumping after him, you notice, though I don't expect there's a ghost of a chance of any one overtaking the fellow this side of the fighting line. Having made such an important discovery, he'll do everything he can to avoid being caught, or made to engage in an air duel."

"The only chance of stopping him that I can see," hazarded Amos, in a speculative manner, "lies in his being met by some French machine before he gets clear away. That might block his hand, and force him to fight."

"He's a game one to wander this far back of the lines," commented Jack. "Of course they often do go as great a distance as Paris, and the coast cities they want to drop bombs on, but those trips are undertaken in the darkness of night."

"Do you suppose, Jack, the news will be now circulated all through the German army that Uncle Sam's fighting boys have really and truly arrived in France, and are training within hearing distance of the boom of the big guns?"

"Well, that's hardly likely," came the quick retort, "and you know the reason why. The Germans never let their people know things that would discourage them. Every message is censored before being given to the press. Defeats are made to appear strategic victories. Even the falling back along the Hindenburg line was made to seem a simple shortening of defenses, intended for luring the Allies on to fresh slaughter. So it isn't at all likely they'd let the German people, or even the soldiers, know the truth about this pioneer army of grim American fighters being here until at last our boys meet the Boches face to face in actual battle."

"Yes, I suppose when American prisoners begin to filter back into Germany," mused Amos, "and stories are being told of how those Yankee dare-devils never seem to know when they are

whipped, the deluded people of the Central Empires will realize what they're up against."

"It's hard to pick out that spying plane now," observed Jack, bending all his energies to the task of looking. "You see, he's mounted even higher than ever, and is dodging in and out of those snowy clouds."

"But the three Frenchies are trailing him like fury," said Amos. "I wouldn't be surprised if they followed the spy clear across the lines, hoping to get a chance to engage him in battle before he can communicate the interesting news he's picked up this afternoon."

Shortly afterward they gave up trying to observe the fleeing aviators. Even with the assistance of such a fine glass it was a thankless task, owing to the great altitude at which the planes flew, as well as the deceptive lights and shadows caused by the sunlight and the floating fleecy clouds.

"We've heard a rumor being circulated that General Pershing may drop in on the camp any old day now, to see how the training is progress-

ing," Amos was saying a little later. "He's come away from Paris, and his headquarters in the field are being made ready, they say."

"That means business," chuckled Jack. "It isn't going to be so long now before those husky boys in khaki will take their places on the firing line, and show what they've got in them. Their life down in Mexico has seasoned them until they're as hard as nails."

"And if the General does come," his chum remarked, with a line across his usually smooth forehead, "it's our intention to ask a great favor of him, which, if granted, will allow us to go forward and commence our hunt for poor little Pauline Winters."

"I certainly hope he'll give us a boost," sighed Jack. "This inaction is mighty hard to stand. We've come too far to waste our time fooling around here. Of course, it's a glorious sight, this camp of our boys here on French soil; but we started out with a project in view, which we've got to keep before our eyes constantly. Every day wasted makes it all the harder for us

to catch up. If Pershing will only give us a paper that would carry weight with the French commanders at the front we could begin work right away. I keep on hoping we shall get track of little Pauline before long."

"Hadn't we better be thinking of starting back to camp?" suggested Amos. "We've got a two-mile hike before us, and the sun will be dropping out of sight over there back of that little wooded ridge inside of half an hour. Besides, supper will be ready by the time we get there, and while the cook of our mess is a good-natured fellow we don't want to impose on him more than we can help."

"Wait! I wonder what that can mean?" observed Jack, putting out a hand as if to restrain his more impatient comrade.

"What have you discovered now?" demanded Amos hastily, showing renewed interest.

This time he saw that his chum was intently observing the distant camp rather than looking up in the direction of the detached clouds.

"I caught a bright flash just then, several of

them, in fact," Jack went on to say. "It looked just like some one might be heliographing a message. Perhaps it's some member of the Signal Corps practicing his code to keep in trim. There, didn't you get that flash? See, more are following it in rapid order. I wonder now where the other end of the air line can be?"

Both boys began to twist their heads to the right and to the left in the endeavor to locate the party with whom the unknown just outside the big camp was communicating. All at once Amos gave utterance to an exclamation of triumph.

"Why, would you believe it, Jack, he's perched up in that lofty tree not three hundred yards away from us right now! I saw a flash shoot out of the leafy top, only one, as if it was meant to tell the signal-sender over yonder that he was on deck, and waiting to take the message."

"Oh, I reckon they're only practicing," commented Jack. "Like everything else, these fellows of the Signal Corps have to keep in touch

with their game or else they may get rusty. Shall we start for camp now?"

"Wait on a bit, please," urged the other.

"What's up?" asked Jack curiously. "Oh, I remember now that once you told me you'd gained considerable experience sending messages by sunrays and a scrap of a broken looking-glass. I suppose now you want to see if you can read the message, and so prove that you haven't quite forgotten your Boy Scout training."

"That's it, Jack," replied Amos, with a little laugh. "It'll only hold us up a few minutes at most, and give me a heap of satisfaction in the bargain, if so be I *do* succeed in reading what he flashes along."

"All right then, Amos, have it your way," and saying this Jack dropped down on a stone which he had occupied a little while before, as though he took a very small amount of interest in the matter; for it would turn out, he had no doubt, to be a mere practice game between two members of the Signal Corps.

"There, he's beginning to send," he heard

Amos muttering, after which a short time elapsed, during which the one who was so eagerly watching each and every bright flash could be seen clinching his hands, and giving every evidence of growing excitement.

Jack finally could not keep his seat; once more he jumped to his feet. He was just in time to see the finis of the series of flashes from the vicinity of the camp. Then the unknown party in the treetop sent back a signal reply, as though to assure the other he had managed to catch the tenor of the message.

"Well, did you make it out?" asked Jack curiously.

"I couldn't," replied his comrade dejectedly, "because it was in a secret cipher, and different from anything ever used by the United States Army senders. Jack, I'm dead sure there was a *number* used, and away up in the thousands, too! What would any ordinary Signal Corps man want to use a number like that for? According to my notion, it would not be allowed. Let me tell you this thing has got me interested a whole

lot. Why, do you know, I'm wondering if we haven't just stumbled on some clever trick of the enemy to send word to German headquarters concerning the full quota of Pershing's army in France!"

Jack stared hard at his companion. At first he seemed hardly able to grasp what Amos meant, although by degrees surprise gave place to a stern expression.

"It seems almost incredible that they would be so bold as all that," he muttered.

"Oh, those German spies will take all sorts of chances," Amos assured him cheerfully. "They may want to have two irons in the fire, you know. If the man in the airplane failed to carry the news back, this chap in the tree would have a chance. What had we better do about it, Jack, tell me?"

## CHAPTER III

### THE MAN IN THE TREE

Jack Maxfield had always shown wonderful ability to grasp things speedily, and form a plan of action on the spur of the moment. Perhaps this had been partly natural with the boy, but then a portion of his life had been spent on a Western ranch, and doubtless there he had learned the value of quick thinking when emergencies arose.

"One thing sure," Jack immediately said to his comrade, "we couldn't dream of getting over to the camp and trying to find who that sender of the strange message in an unknown code is. It would be out of the question to have a detachment hurry over here to pick up the chap in the treetop. He'd have vanished long before any doughboys could rush this way. If anything is done, we've got to tackle the job ourselves, Amos."

"All right," snapped Amos. "I'm curious to know who the man over yonder can be. Let's make a bee-line for that high tree. If we're smart we ought to get there before he can slip down to the ground."

"I'm with you!" said Jack, and they started without another word.

Both had taken particular pains to fix the location of the tall tree in their minds. This was important, since it would be an easy thing to make a mistake, and have all their trouble for their pains.

As they drew closer to the spot, they took extra pains to avoid making any quick movement such as might attract attention. Likewise, they looked out for trailing vines, or other objects that were apt to trip the unwary. A sudden fall must of necessity be accompanied by more or less commotion, and this might warn the descending unknown that his signal-tower was under surveillance. If, as they dimly suspected, he proved to be other than a member of the American Signal Corps, he would be

apt to take the alarm, and they would have considerable trouble in locating him. He might even conclude to remain in the leafy tree until darkness arrived, to hide his movements from hostile observation.

Jack touched the arm of his companion suggestively.

"That's the tree over yonder," he whispered, nodding his head in a certain quarter, "the one with the big butt. Notice that it's got limbs close enough to the ground to allow any active chap a good chance to climb up without much trouble."

"Jack, there's surely something moving up among the branches!" Amos whispered, guarding his voice carefully.

"He's coming down," murmured Jack. "Let's hide behind this fringe of bushes and watch. If it turns out to be a man in khaki, with the crossed signal flags on his hat, we can step out and walk back to camp with him. Careful now, Amos; he's going to drop right away."

Crouching there, with rapidly beating hearts,

the two boys awaited the final outcome to their little adventure. They could see a moving figure up amidst the rustling foliage. It was not possible to distinguish more than the mere outlines of the unknown party; still their excitement grew more intense as they realized that the object of their curiosity was about to drop down to the lower limb from which he could readily land on the ground beneath.

When presently they saw him take the last plunge both boys temporarily stopped breathing, such was the spasm that gripped them. First of all, the party was not garbed in the well-known army khaki, nor did he wear a hat such as distinguished Uncle Sam's boys. On the contrary, he seemed to be a native of the country, garbed in blue jeans, and with wooden sabots for his feet, which last he had apparently left at the base of the tree upon climbing the same, for his first act was to stoop and replace them.

His whole manner was suggestive of suspicion. He glanced hastily about him as if he

feared some enemy might be lurking back of every tree or cluster of thick brush. Amos understood instantly that this could not be the manner of an innocent man. Besides, what would tempt a French rustic to climb a tree and get in communication with some unknown party outside the American camp?

Both boys instantly made up their minds that the man would bear watching. What a fortunate thing for them that they had lingered there long enough to make this discovery! It might turn out of incalculable value to the American forces in France. Perhaps the Germans were planning to stampede the camp when its location should be discovered. Fifty or more airplanes of the latest three-man model might be sent out to bombard the men in khaki from across the sea, fairly deluging their cantonment with terrible explosives.

Such a thing would be in keeping with the German idea of "frightfulness," as already exploited in the instance of passenger vessels torpedoed without warning, cities and shore water-

ing places over in England bombed, innocent women and children killed by scores, and no military object attained; hospital ships in the Channel attacked and sunk; and latest but most dreadful of all, hospitals far back of the battle line, well known to the Germans for months, attacked, and many of the nurses and patients murdered by showers of bombs.

Amos put out a hand and touched his companion. He bent his head in order to get his lips close to the other's ear.

"See, he's moving off, Jack! What shall we do about it?"

"Follow him if we can, and see what he's up to," came the soft-spoken reply.

This pleased Amos. He would have been very much disappointed had his chum said anything different, for he was already quite positive that the man in the smock who had been up in the lofty eyrie communicating with an unknown party nearer the American cantonment, must be a spy working in the interest of the enemy. Yes, undoubtedly he was one of

those daring fellows accustomed to taking their lives in their hands, and ready to do anything, however perilous, if it served the interest of the Fatherland.

The man was indeed moving away. He acted as though he wished to get clear of the place, now that he had received his message which possibly contained much valuable information for the German general who commanded that portion of the fighting lines. Indeed, acting on it he might, by a concerted attack by means of the aerial fleet at his command, deal a staggering blow at the morale of the newcomers.

The boys held themselves in check until it seemed safe to make a start. Both had had much experience in the art of following a supposed enemy without letting him become aware of their presence. Amos had picked up his information as to the ways and means of tracking when a member of a scout organization. Jack had been through trials without number out West, at the time he lived on a ranch and went hunting with the cowboys, sometimes for

stray mavericks, and again looking for cattle thieves who had crossed over the border and were trying to run off some of the long-horn stock.

They crept along, bent nearly double, and taking advantage of every object that could be made to serve as a screen for their bodies.

The man continued to act in a suspicious manner. He looked frequently from side to side, meanwhile attempting to play the part of a clumsy countryman. Several times he turned his head and glanced behind him. On these occasions both boys remained as motionless as stones, knowing that unless a movement caught his attention there was little chance of their presence being discovered amidst the bushes and trees.

Much ground had been covered in this fashion, and it was noticed by Jack that the pretended French farm-hand kept going farther and farther away from the camp. Even a small thing like this looked suspicious to Jack, who was revolving in his mind the necessity of pre-

venting this bold spy from getting away. In some way or other, then, it seemed incumbent on Jack and Amos to arrange it so that the German secret agent should be detained. The man had accepted all risks when undertaking this commission and could not complain if his life paid the forfeit for his rashness.

Grimly, Jack was making up his mind. It was true that neither he nor Amos had a single weapon in their possession, and the chances were that this desperate man would be prepared to sell his liberty dearly. But then there might be ways to combat such inequalities. Jack had been famous for inventing methods of gaining his end against all obstacles.

He noticed that the man was no longer moving away. He had come to a halt, and seemed to be taking a sweeping survey of his surroundings, as though desirous of making sure that he was not being watched before proceeding to attempt something else.

"He's going to get busy, Jack," breathed

Amos, fairly quivering with eagerness and suspense.

The man in the blue jeans smock and the wooden sabots had commenced to drag away some dead brush that had been used as a sort of *camouflage* or means of concealment for an unknown object lying underneath.

Both boys craned their necks, wondering greatly what the man could have hidden. Amos conceived the idea it would prove to be a motorcycle on which he could spin over the roads where they were not pitted with craters or shell holes. Jack, on the other hand, rather inclined toward the belief that the man had some sort of cave or hiding place under that brush, in which he meant to conceal himself until the coast was clear, and then start toward the north so as to gain the German lines.

They knew that it had become quite an art among the French gunners to hide the big guns in this fashion under a screen which resembled the surrounding foliage or earth. This was done in order to keep circling hostile aviators

from discovering the location of batteries, from either snapping off a photograph of the same or signaling its position to their own observers many miles away, so that a rain of shells might be dropped on the emplacement, and disable the guns. The French word, *camouflage,* became a very important one in the limited French lexicon of the American soldiers, who were quite proficient in the clever trick of hiding their batteries from overhead observation. It would take a leading part in their education as the days rolled into weeks and they began to take their place shoulder to shoulder with their allies, the French and British, on the firing line.

"He's got something hidden under all that stuff, believe me," muttered Amos.

Indeed, Jack was also changing his mind and arriving at that some conclusion. The man in the blue smock was really clearing too wide a swathe to indicate that he meant to burrow to the opening of any cave under the ground. They watched every movement eagerly, expect-

ing that any minute the meaning of his queer actions would be made clear.

"Notice that there's an open space just beyond where he's working like a beaver, don't you, Jack?" whispered Amos presently. "Now, that may stand for something, according to my notion; I believe I got a peek at a strip of dun-colored canvas. Jack, would you think me crazy if I said I believed that man might have an airplane of his own concealed under all that trash?"

"Then there are two of us in the same boat, Amos," came the low reply, "because that was just what I had made up my mind it was. He means to make a break and carry the important message he got from that other spy to the German lines!"

## CHAPTER IV

### JACK HAS A SCHEME

"Jack, we ought to keep him from doing that, you know," suggested Amos.

"We will," affirmed the other energetically.

"Do you think he means to go up now, or wait till after darkness comes?" questioned Amos, still watching the man.

The mysterious party was bending over as though busily engaged in testing some part of the extended object that had been so artfully hidden under the brush that its presence might not have been suspected had one walked past only ten feet away.

"That's hard to say, Amos," replied Jack. "If we were sure he'd hold over, we might have plenty of time to trot to the camp and get help. But he might run for it."

"Let's stick it out here, and try to plan some scheme to nab him," urged ambitious Amos.

He had often watched French and British

army aviators flashing through space at the rate of a hundred and more miles an hour. His own brother Frank, serving the Allies as one of their crack pilots, first in France and later on at the Dardanelles, had told him that the speed limit had never yet been attained by airmen. Once this spy went aloft, it would be next to hopeless to think of overtaking him; so that it became of considerable importance that they keep him from making the attempt.

How to do this was another matter. He seemed to be a sturdily built fellow, and his daring was not to be questioned, since his actions spoke for themselves. Any man willing to hazard the chance he was now running must be absolutely without fear.

Hence it would be a risky thing for two unarmed boys to try and capture such a desperate character unassisted. To accomplish it they would have to resort to some clever scheme through which the man could be taken totally unawares, and the advantages he possessed be rendered null and void.

Amos was quite willing to let Jack shoulder the responsibility for this part of the arrangements. He had seen his cousin "under fire" so many times, and come out with flying colors, that somehow it was second nature nowadays for Amos to say to himself, when any really difficult task confronted them: "Let Jack tackle it."

"There, he's going away, Jack! what can that move mean?" whispered Amos, when the man was seen to walk along a path that led toward the right.

"He's got a tin cup in his hand," explained Jack. "As like as not there happens to be a spring over yonder close by, and feeling thirsty he means to get a drink. Yes, that's the explanation. You see, he's bending down and dipping the cup in right now."

Presently the man in the blue smock came back, as though his thirst had been temporarily assuaged. It was quite warm, and Amos licked his dry lips as if he himself would not mind a "swig" of that cool spring water. Such

a move was not to be thought of for a minute, as it might endanger the success of their plan of campaign. Better thirst than, by a false move, betray their presence to the enemy.

Watching, they saw that the man was working at something. Possibly his plane was in need of repairs, which he considered the present as good a time as any to devote to making. Before ascending, a wise and prudent pilot always tests every taut wire guy, as well as each bolt and nut, to make absolutely certain that there is no fault connected with his machine such as might betray him when a mile from the surface of the earth. If the old saying, "An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure," is worthy of acceptance in the ordinary channels of life, it certainly doubly applies in aeronautics, where a man's life is dependent on such trifling things, and a mistake is very apt to be followed by fatal consequences.

The minutes passed by. Both boys continued to hover back of the friendly bushes and watch all that the suspected man was doing.

Again the man started along the little path, holding the tin cup in his hand. That was dry work upon which he was engaged, or else he chanced to be suffering from an unusual spell of thirst.

Jack raised himself still more so as to watch the man moving off, examining the lay of the land at the same time. Already the ghost of an idea had commenced to filter through his active brain.

"Come, Amos, let's get down on all fours, and begin to creep along so as to come up in that quarter where the spring lies. I've got my scheme!" he whispered.

"Huh! I knew it would come along, given a little time," grunted the other. "Are we to hide out by the spring, and jump at him if he comes a third time?"

"Wait and see," was the only answer he received.

They started to wriggle along, taking care that the bushes should constantly serve as a barrier and hide them from observation. Once the

man got back to his engrossing work, they could move at a faster pace.

The sun was near the horizon. Shortly it would dip out of sight. Then the gloaming would creep over the devastated land. Already objects had begun to grow less visible under the trees, although out in the open it was still broad daylight. Even these small things help when one is creeping on hands and knees and endeavoring to hide from suspicious eyes.

Borne on the evening air from the camp two miles away came the murmurous sounds that always mark the presence of thousands of human beings, as well as numerous animals, congregated in a certain district. Horses neighed, and mules brayed, while human voices, and the clear notes of bugles added to the aggregation of noises. Earlier in the day there might have been heard a myriad of queer sounds when the French instructors showed the Americans just how to avoid the rattling volleys of rapid-fire guns, how to dodge hurtling shells, and go "over the top" of the "dugouts" when commencing an

assault of the enemy's position, following the barrage fire that screened them from the foe's reinforcements, as well as prevented those in the hostile trenches from escaping.

The mysterious stranger was once more back on his job. He certainly meant to have his plane in "apple-pie" shape before departing. The two boys kept on creeping. Jack was swinging around as well as the line of bushes permitted, and would soon hit a place close to the spring. Perhaps Amos might yet find an opportunity to secure the drink he wanted worse than ever.

"Here's the spring, you see, Amos," ventured Jack, after a bit. "So get your swig if you must. I'll keep watch over our friend there while you're down on your knees."

"That suits me to a fraction," Amos gurgled, the prospect of getting a drink filling him with joy. Without wasting any more time, he proceeded to flatten himself out on his chest, as only an agile boy can, and ducked his head down to the brim of the bubbling spring.

The water was prime, and he sucked in great

quantities of it, until his parched throat had satisfied its longing. Then he joined Jack, eager to learn the nature of the plan which the other had evolved.

"It all depends on whether he sticks at his job long enough to have that thirst come over him again," Jack explained, always careful to keep his voice so low that there was not the slightest danger of its being heard ten feet away.

That puzzled Amos, if the look of bewilderment on his face signified anything. Perhaps he began to wonder if it was intended to do something to the water so as to make the spy stupid if he should imbibe plentifully again. Another thought dawned upon Amos. He stared at the spring, and then nodded his head slowly.

"Yes," he went on to say in a sibilant tone. "We might jump on him when he stoops over to fill his tin-cup, but do you think there's really enough cover handy to hide us while he's coming along?"

"You're away off in your guess," Jack told him. "My plan isn't along that line at all. I

can see just what I want over there not far away. Come with me, Amos, and we'll fix a trap to trip our man up. It's easy enough to arrange one when there are convenient wild-grape vines handy, as I notice is the case here."

"Oh!" said Amos, and his manner told that he was no longer groping in the dark for an explanation.

They worked their way along the path which the man had followed in coming to the spring. Sure enough, quite a profusion of stout vines could be seen growing on either side of the trail. It would not be a difficult job to drag one of these so as to form a pitfall across the path; and when any one started to step over, why, at a preconcerted signal the two on either side could so cause the vine to get entangled in his legs as to throw him from his balance. Struggling on all fours, taken completely off his guard, their opportunity would have come to throw their weight on his back, and hold him pinned down to the ground!

## CHAPTER V

### THE TRAPPED SPY

Amos was all animation now. Jack's plan struck him as offering every chance for a successful operation looking to the capture of the German spy. Already, in imagination, he could see the stout Teuton who played the part of a French native sprawled out on his chest, with the two of them astride his back, and holding him helpless there a prisoner.

"Get located over on that side of the trail," whispered Jack. "When you feel me start to raise the vine, do your part. We'll experiment first so as to be sure it's going to work."

Accordingly, each one took up a position and laid hold of the vine that had offered itself so temptingly for the occasion. Once, twice did they give it a little upward swing. It seemed to answer their purpose admirably, and Jack nodded his head as if to assure his comrade that

"everything was lovely and the goose swung high," as Amos would have said, if given an opportunity.

Everything now depended on whether the mysterious stranger would for a third time feel the need of a drink. Amos hoped his throat was already getting uncomfortably dry. The recollection of the cooling water of that delicious spring was very apt to cause him to yearn for yet another drink before he figured on quitting that neighborhood by means of the air route.

Every little while one or the other of the concealed boys would carefully raise his head above the screening bushes and take an observation. Their attention was wholly directed toward that one quarter where the man bent to his task. Luckily he seemed so busily engaged that he had no time for looking about him, only occasionally he would stand up and sweep his eyes around the limited circle bounding his horizon.

Nothing happened to disturb him, for that was a lonely section and had evidently been chosen for his landing place on this very account.

Minutes dragged on, and Amos found his impatience growing. He began to fear the man had forgotten all about that fine spring, and might even start off on his trip toward the north without paying the water-hole a last visit.

Now he had evidently completed his repairs, such as they were, for he seemed to be putting away the tools he had been using. Amos felt his heart stop beating, such was his suspense. Then he gave a low sigh of satisfaction. He had seen the man pick something up, which, as near as he could judge, was the tin cup.

Amos cowered closer to the ground, not wishing to be seen. He also lay quite still, though gripping his end of the stout wild-grape vine eagerly and holding himself ready for a sudden and violent jerk when the proper second arrived.

He could just manage to glimpse Jack through a small opening in the bushes. The other was making a slight movement with his hand, as though to give full warning that the crisis was approaching.

Nearer came the man. Luckily he seemed to

have no suspicion of any danger menacing him. Why should he suspect, when he had seen no sign of a human being around that vicinity, owing to the clever way in which the two boys had carried out their various movements?

Closer he came until at last he actually stepped across the vine. Instantly Jack dragged his end back, and the vine started to ascend between the man's legs. Amos too was pulling like a horse, and the consequence was that, taken unawares, the man found himself thrown down violently.

He started to struggle, but like a flash the agile boys were upon him. Never had they hurled themselves upon the fellow running with the pigskin oval in a football tackle with more vim than they now exhibited in casting themselves on the man on the ground. He found himself immediately flattened out on his face, with a pair of sturdy chaps perched along his back—and ready to proceed much further, if necessary.

"Stop that kicking unless you want us to pound your head off!" commanded Amos, who

chanced to have the lower extremities in his charge and was considerably "put to it" to keep them quiet, for the man, realizing that he was in a serious predicament, had commenced to struggle with might and main.

Jack made a discovery. The spy was vainly trying to locate a pocket in his trousers, as though it might contain some sort of firearm which he madly desired to get his hand on, in order to use the weapon upon his unseen enemies.

"Thanks for the suggestion," snapped Jack promptly. "I can make good use of that myself."

He managed to possess himself of the automatic. After that he tapped the man gently on the head with the weapon.

"Now behave yourself, or we'll be forced to hurt you!" he told the other, putting a ring of authority into his voice.

The man did not dream that he had been made the victim of a couple of boys. Naturally, he supposed they must be some of the American

soldiers from the nearby training camp, who had sighted him there and trapped him.

So Jack was able to jerk both his arms behind his back as he lay there helpless on his chest. Taking out his own serviceable and large bandana handkerchief he turned to his chum, saying:

"Here, Amos, get a move on you, and wrap this around his wrists. The rest of you stay where you are, and if he makes any resistance just give him a knock on the head with a gun."

Apparently the man understood English enough to grasp what this seemed to mean. He could twist his head partly around, though pressed down so closely to the ground; and while unable to discover an armed posse of men in khaki hovering over him, he had no doubt they were there.

Amos hastened to comply with the request made by his chum. He knew how to utilize that strong red bandana to good advantage by twisting it around both wrists until he could have defied the prisoner to get a hand free.

"Now, we'll help you get on your feet, Mister

Kaiser!" said Jack, as he relieved the prostrate man of his weight, a proceeding in which Amos, too, took a part.

The astonishment of the man when he saw that they were only a couple of well-grown but husky lads was amusing to Jack and Amos. He looked as though greatly humiliated and disgusted to discover that he had been so cleverly trapped by apparently insignificant persons.

"We've got to take him with us," said Jack. "He may be loaded down with maps and all sorts of valuable information about the American camp."

"What do you reckon they'll do with him?" asked Amos, a little uneasily.

"I'm not bothering my head about that part of it," retorted Jack firmly. "All I know is he was caught in the act, and must suffer the consequences, no matter what they may be. There's another chap somewhere around here that ought to have his wings clipped. They may keep it quiet about this fellow until they have a chance to locate his pard. Now, step out lively, Mister;

He looked as though greatly humiliated and disgusted to discover that he had been so cleverly trapped ---*Page* 58

you seem to be interested in the doings of Pershing's boys, and so we're going to give you an inside view of the American camp."

One on either side of their prisoner they forced him to walk along, though his steps lagged more or less, for he really had no heart in his work now, knowing what a terrible fate loomed up before him. Spies caught in time of war generally meet with a short shrift. They know this when they deliberately choose to risk such a fate in the effort to serve their country.

Little was said by either of the boys as they proceeded. Once the man stopped in his tracks, and speaking very fair English tried to argue with his captors. Apparently he cherished a slight hope that he might be able to bribe them to let him go free. He no longer attempted to play the simple rustic, because he knew that game would never work, since they had caught him alongside his airplane, and this was what Amos called a "dead give-away."

"None of that stuff will pass muster with us," Jack told him very sternly. "We watched you

taking the signals of that chap with the flash glass. You are here in the capacity of a spy, and we mean to land you in the American camp, dead or alive. Now, get a move on you and be off."

The man sullenly refused to stir a foot, but Jack was equal to even such a situation as this.

"Listen," he went on to say steadily, "you are going there even if we have to knock you on the head and then carry you by the neck and heels. I should think you'd sooner walk, and save yourself all that suffering. Take your own choice, but decide quickly, that's all. We have no time to fritter away on you!"

His manner was so hostile that it carried conviction with it, so the spy gritted his teeth, looked daggers at the speaker, and then once more commenced to walk on between his captors. His manner was dejected, as might be expected, for all his late high hopes of success, and perhaps reward, had gone glimmering.

The sun had long since set, and over the devastated fields of Northern France the soft twilight was stealing, hiding the awful ravages that

marked the retreat of the German army in this fiercely contested section.

Eventually they came to the outermost sentry, whose challenge brought the trio to a halt. But the boys had the countersign, and found no difficulty in making their way into the camp. Here their appearance aroused considerable curiosity. Without giving any sort of explanation concerning the meaning of the strange man in the blue blouse and wooden sabots having his hands tied behind his back, they took him toward Headquarters.

Ten minutes afterwards and they stood in the presence of the general commanding during Pershing's absence, and who was listening with intense interest to what Jack had to tell. After hearing the whole story he commended the chums heartily.

"You have done a splendid thing, my boys," he told them, shaking hands with each in turn. "We will have this man searched from the skin out, and see that he is kept incommunicado. Say nothing of this to any one. We shall have a

better chance of discovering his confederate if the arrest is kept secret. Perhaps, by your fortunate discovery, you may have saved this camp from a deluge of bombs. Now that this matter is a closed incident for the time being, I shall have the man taken away. No, do not leave just yet, boys. Strangely enough I was asking about you not an hour ago, and learned that you had gone for a stroll. I left word that I desired you to drop in and see me when you returned. You know I felt considerable interest in your mission to this section of the country, and have been doing all I could to assist you. Something has occurred that will doubtless afford you much satisfaction."

Turning, he gave orders that the spy should be taken in charge, and placed in the guard-house under strict watch. He also conferred with one of his aides for a brief time, and as the latter started to leave the tent the general called out:

"Look up that French aviator who was in here an hour or so ago, and ask him to come back

again. I have the boys with me now, and he can tell them the strange story that thrilled me."

To Jack and Amos the general smilingly continued:

"You shall soon know what it means, boys, when this wounded air pilot explains how in a most amazing way he found himself an honored guest in the cellars of the shell-shattered Villefue Chateau some months ago. Here he comes now, sooner than I anticipated they could find him; prepare to hear a thrilling story."

## CHAPTER VI

### WHAT THE FRENCH AVIATOR TOLD

A man entered and saluted. Jack immediately noticed that he walked a little stiffly, as though still suffering from some wound received long since.

He was undoubtedly a Frenchman. His swarthy face was lean, and his black eyes had a peculiar snap to them that told of a dauntless soul. Yes, he seemed to be just the kind of a man capable of making a successful air pilot. Jack compared him with the brother of Amos, whose record as a destroyer of German airplanes had long since made him famous.

"This is Lieutenant Luffert, of the French Aviation Corps," said the general, as the newcomer stood at attention. "These are the two brave American boys about whom I spoke to you. They have crossed the ocean to search for the little granddaughter of Madam Villefue, of

whom you told me, and to take the child back home to her mother in America. The letter you assured me you mailed for the old lady of the chateau must have been long delayed, for it was only received a few weeks since. Now, I have some important business to look after, so I shall leave you three here in my quarters to talk it over. Before I go I wish only to tell my young friends here that Lieutenant Luffert is known to be one of the most brilliant aviators in the French service. He speaks splendid English, so I feel certain you will get on famously."

Both boys and the French air pilot returned the salute of the kindly officer as he left them. Amos and Jack were eager to hear what the other had to say. Already they could surmise that it must be a strange story, or the general would never have aroused their curiosity as he had.

They made themselves as comfortable as the circumstances would permit. The dapper little air pilot had meanwhile been observing them closely. Doubtless he must have heard about the

two from the general during his other interview, for there was sincere admiration in his manner as he said:

"You will be pleased to know that I am acquainted with Frank Bradford, who I understand is a brother to one of you. We worked together some years ago while he was on this front. He saved my life on two different occasions, and France owes much to his wonderful courage and daring. It is a great pleasure for me to meet one who is connected with him by ties of blood. Then, too, I have heard something of your own adventures at the time you were searching everywhere for Frank. However, I know you are eager to learn what I have to tell you about the Villefue Chateau, how I chanced through the fortunes of war to find myself under its shattered roof. I shall therefore proceed.

"It happened almost six months ago. I had been flying far back of the German lines with several of my mates, bombing an airdome. We made a good job of it, too, for we saw the whole structure in flames before we stopped. Enemy

'planes had come up to give us battle, and I myself was engaged with three at a time, all determined to bring me down.

"The fight carried us many miles away. I found myself separated from my fellows, and hotly pursued by a number of hostile 'planes. When we came to close quarters we used our quick-firing guns, and did everything in our power to fetch each other to the ground a quarter of a mile below. I had the satisfaction of seeing one of my opponents go swinging down, his machine in flames.

"On my part, my 'plane was fairly riddled, the petrol tank leaking, and I wounded in several places, seriously, too, I realized. Still, I fought them as best I could, in the hope that I might manage to make my way across the line, and land on friendly territory.

"Then I felt myself falling, and knew that the game was up. In spite of all my efforts I could not recover my balance, and the last thing I remembered was when my 'plane crashed into the treetops.

"When I came to my senses it was broad daylight. I was lying there on the ground and around me I discovered the wreck of my poor machine. At first I could hardly move. My right leg was broken, and I seemed to have bled from a dozen shot wounds, so that I was very weak. Through the openings in what trees remained I caught a glimpse of a noble building, now, alas! sadly dilapidated, pillaged by the Boches, and struck by innumerable shells from our guns, showing that the enemy persisted in using its towers and turrets for an observation post, and drawing our fire in consequence.

"Rendered desperate by my terrible condition, I commenced to drag myself in that direction. Ah! young messieurs, it was a dreadful task. Twice did I lose consciousness on the way, only to proceed again when my senses returned. I thought I should surely die from weakness before I drew near those stricken walls.

"After the third time I fainted it was to recover my senses and hear a sympathetic voice, and find a singular-looking elderly lady bend-

ing over me. I knew she was French at once. She told me she was Madame Villefue, and that it was her chateau the ruins of which I had seen. Although frequently bombarded, and now but a wreck of its one-time grandeur, it still possessed a fascination for her. She had been born there, and had lived there all her life; while one stone remained on another she was grimly determined never to be chased away from her home.

"Ah! never had I met such a wonderful old lady. Her soul was as brave as any possessed by a warrior. Nothing they could do would frighten her. She lived on scanty rations in the deepest cellars under the chateau, where the terrible shells could not strike.

"I was the first Frenchman she had seen for over two years, and she could not let me lie there in the open to suffer. How she managed to get me into the cellar, even I, Jules Luffert, cannot tell you; but in the end it was accomplished. Much do I owe to her courage and devotion, my life itself, for I should have surely died had I remained unattended.

"She concealed me for weeks, and fed me from her scanty stores as though I had been the son she so willingly gave to beloved France. Many times did I hear the brutal voices of the Germans threatening her, but even they seemed cowed by her wonderfully unflinching courage and defiance.

"Then there was a little girl who talked French as though it were her native tongue, and I did not suspect that her mother was an American until the Madam told me the story. That was when I had partly recovered, so that I talked of trying to get through the lines and rejoining my own people; for I assure you, my heart was wild to once more soar through space like a bird, and engage the hated enemy at close quarters until one or both of us was shot down.

"She had a letter which she begged me to post for her, if fortune was kind and allowed me to get through with my life. Yes, it was directed to America, I well remember, and to the mother of the little Pauline who, she told me, was her granddaughter.

"Then the time came when I crept forth. It was no easy task, young messieurs, I assure you, and I had more than one narrow call before making good my escape through the lines. I will not say more about my own personal troubles, because it is with the brave old lady of the chateau you are concerned, she and her charming little companion.

"It is now all of five months since I said goodbye to them, and true to my promise I faithfully posted her letter the very first thing after finding myself in safety. That it has been so long delayed I cannot understand, save that the censor is to blame, or perhaps war-normal transportation across the submarine-infested seas may have been interrupted. Often, while recovering from my wounds, have my thoughts returned to that devastated chateau and its valiant owner. I shall never forget her as long as I live. She kissed me on both cheeks when I came away. Whether she be still in the flesh, or fallen a victim to bursting shells, Heaven only knows. But I hope and pray you may find those you seek,

and that success will crown your mission to France."

The two boys had listened almost breathlessly while the French aviator told of his startling adventures in this simple fashion. They could easily read between the lines, and understand what he must have gone through with, especially at the time he made his perilous way past the Germans, and managed to rejoin his comrades who had doubtless long since given him up for dead.

They had a dozen questions on the tips of their tongues as soon as it seemed that he had arrived at the end of his story. These he answered as accurately as he could, and gave them such information concerning the Chateau Villefue as might prove of value to them, if later on they managed to visit the place.

"Since that time," he explained, "the battle line has been altered. No longer do the German trenches run miles in front of that ruined chateau. Thanks to our brave General Petain, we have pushed the Boches back until even now they

lie entrenched on the other side of the noble building, and the devastated estate that was once the pride of the whole country. Villefue Chateau lies in No Man's Land, between the hostile armies. Sometimes it sees a German raiding party sweep past and strike our trenches. Then perhaps it is the French who make a swift dash upon the enemy to bomb their dugouts, destroy whatever they can of military value, and then fall back, bearing a number of prisoners with them to prove to the commanding general what they have accomplished.

"It is a dangerous zone for any one to invade, young messieurs. If you go there, let me tell you it will be taking your lives in your hands. I would strongly urge you to refrain from doing such a rash thing, only I know my warning would not restrain such valiant hearts, bent on an errand of mercy. What you have accomplished in the past bids me hope that success may also accompany you in this new adventure. I trust you will return in safety, and that not only the little child, but the heroic aged owner of the chateau

may be induced to come with you, if she is yet in the land of the living."

He had told them everything now. Jack and Amos even drew from the description a rude sketch of the chateau and immediate surroundings. He admitted, however, that it could not be very accurate since his opportunities for getting around had been extremely limited, owing to his wounded condition and the danger that constantly confronted him of running upon some party of German soldiers coming to signal from the still standing fragments of the once splendid chateau towers.

So they parted with him, and proceeded to the humble cottage upon which they had been billeted since arriving in the neighborhood of the camp. The good people who lived there, though very poor, had clung to their humble home through all privations. Since the coming of the Americans they had found many ways for increasing their meagre fund, the old man doing chores and the woman through cooking French

cakes and bread that found a ready sale at high prices.

Jack and Amos were thrilled with the news they had just listened to. It was the first word they had received of the inmates of the chateau since arriving on French soil. True, after all, what they had heard had happened months back, in fact, before the time that letter received from Madame Villefue had been posted in Paris. It was only a description in detail of the events leading up to the letter being mailed; but nevertheless it all seemed to give them a new inspiration. They chose to believe that the indomitable spirit that had sustained the old French lady through all those dreadful months, even years, of the German occupation, would still enable her to hold out, now that her beloved compatriots were within hearing distance; and did she but choose to desert her ruined chateau she might easily have found safety back of their lines.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE COMING OF PERSHING

"I wonder, Jack, what happened to that poor wretch of a German spy we fetched into camp? We haven't heard a single word about him, and it was two days ago it all happened."

"Oh, they're keeping him shut up for the present, I reckon," the other replied. "It may be he's been handed over to the French to deal with. What they want to do is to discover who his confederate will turn out to be. It's awkward to know that there's a slippery spy somewhere about the camp, and his identity unsuspected. I only hope they get the second chap."

"Do you think they'll shoot that fellow?" asked Amos slowly, as though the idea gave him a certain amount of uneasiness.

Jack was not quite so tender-hearted. He had roughed it much more than his cousin, when out West, and had been in touch with the strenuous

side of life, so that his nerves were stronger. He did not feel so "squeamish" in connection with the possible fate of the German whom they had captured.

"Well, the chances look that way, Amos. He was caught inside our lines, and after communicating with another spy. If they find incriminating documents, and perhaps maps ditto on him, after he has been searched, I rather guess his goose will be cooked. I'm sorry for the fellow, but it is the fortune of war. He did not open his mouth in the presence of the general, you noticed, to complain. He is a soldier, and those Germans can face death without flinching, I'll say that for them, even if they do show all sorts of cruelty in their work."

"Just to think of the queer streak of luck that brought Lieutenant Luffert to the American camp, and induced him to tell his story to the general when he had occasion to meet him on another matter of business. While it didn't throw much light on our affairs, at the same time it was refreshing to meet some one who had actu-

ally been with little Pauline and her grandmother in the bombarded Villefue Chauteau."

"Did you hear what he said about the little girl, Amos, how she chattered away in purest French, so that he never once suspected she was anything else until the old lady told him?"

"That is perfectly natural, I should say," Amos replied reflectively. "We've got to remember that the war has been going on for three years, and all that time, besides nearly a year before that, Pauline has been with her grandmother. No wonder she talks French like a native. By now she hardly remembers that she has a dear mother across the sea waiting for her, and praying that she may be restored to her arms."

"Five months is pretty long," mused Jack, "and a whole lot might happen in that time. So we mustn't let our hopes soar too high, remember."

"If we could run across some one who had visited the old chateau later on, and be able to tell us everything was all right, how happy that

would make us," Amos ventured, shaking his head dolefully. In his mind he was picturing all manner of dreadful things happening to those who persisted in living in the cellars of the ruined chateau situated in the tempestuous region known as No Man's Land, because lying halfway between the hostile armies it was almost daily the scene of some sanguinary engagement, every rod of its torn surface having possibly witnessed fierce struggles between the contending foes.

"Well, let us hope the time is coming close now when we can start out and learn the truth for ourselves," said Jack earnestly. "It does seem that we're being continually balked in our designs, even with all the commanding general has done to push our request along, and put it up to the French military authorities. They are engaged in such gigantic schemes I'm afraid that all minor things are tossed aside as not worthy of consideration. There is just one person who can help us, and I pin my faith on his doing something that will count."

"Oh! if General Pershing would only come here," sighed Amos. "Yes, he would cut the Gordian knot for us, and in a hurry, too, I firmly believe. But what's the use of moping in this way? Let's get outdoors, and in the camp we'll find some jolly fellows whose songs and merry talk will chase the blues away."

They had already made many acquaintances among Pershing's boys, and greatly enjoyed hearing them tell about their strange experiences upon the sandy deserts of the country below the Rio Grande, whence they had come almost direct to France.

Some of the bronzed fellows in Uncle Sam's khaki had faced Villa guerrillas, and fought them to a finish. Others had yarns to spin concerning the dreadful sand storms that threatened to suffocate them on the vast wastes across which Pershing's trail led toward Chihuahua. Still another lot had been with the hundreds of army transport motor trucks in their long journey across the dead-lands, and could look back to numerous perils that hung over their heads—

from thirst, torrid heat, prowling wolves, as well as savage rebels on the warpath, desirous of securing rich booty in the shape of a truck loaded with provisions or other supplies.

Such reminiscences had a sort of fascination for Jack in particular, because he had been familiar with desert country, and hence could enter into the spirit of the recital much better than Amos, who had never been West.

They looked in vain for any sign of Lieutenant Luffert. Doubtless the intrepid French aviator had departed to other scenes after completing his mission to the American camp. Jack did hazard an opinion, however, that possibly he might be one of a squadron of fliers assigned to the duty of protecting the American training camp. They were said to be keeping themselves in readiness somewhere near by, so as to take to the air and give battle, did any force of the enemy appear in sight, with evil designs against the newcomers.

Once Jack had casually run across the general, who gave him a friendly greeting in response to

the boy's regulation military salute, and remarked as he was passing by:

"We haven't succeeded yet in locating that second rascal, but a clue has been struck, and we are in hopes of getting him presently. I also regret to tell you that up to now I have been utterly unable to get a favorable answer from the French Headquarters with regard to granting you boys permission to visit their active front in the neighborhood where that old chateau stands. But when General Pershing arrives you shall see him, and if any one can secure a favor it will be him. So don't get discouraged; everything comes to him who waits."

It was now the third day since the boys had listened to the story of Lieutenant Luffert with so much interest. Amos believed he had detected a stir about the camp that portended something out of the usual drills and practice in throwing bombs. Over at Headquarters he could see the aides were going and coming with considerably more frequency than had been known for days.

These things encouraged them to believe that

their long period of waiting was likely to terminate before a great while. When Pershing came it would doubtless be unannounced, so as to catch the camp unawares, if possible; for that was the grim general's way. Like Joffre and Petain and Haig he was a firm believer in readiness at all times, and would never stand for slackness in discipline. Even down there under that burning sun of sub-tropical Mexico, his fighting men were always prepared for an attack, for they knew they were dealing with a treacherous foe, whose wiles would shame a red Indian.

All through that morning Amos cast many eager looks along the road which would very likely witness the coming of the general. He never saw a cloud of dust rise but that his heart seemed to jump up in his throat, though a dozen times he found himself bitterly disappointed. Sometimes it turned out to be only a squad of hard riders returning to camp after a gallop; or again perhaps a convoy of groaning freight trucks coming in with the day's supplies for the army.

The boys were like a pair of impatient horses straining at their tethers. They longed to be on the move and making progress. This standing still was against all their principles. Precious hours and even days were being wasted, and it weighed more and more heavily on their minds that they might be sorely needed at Villefue Chateau.

"It's terrible, that's what," Amos complained for the tenth time at least, as they stood after the noon hour, and watched the various movements of the khaki-clad hosts around them. "I'm actually taking root here. If only something would happen to give us a boost I'd be mighty thankful. Unless it comes along soon I'll be tempted to cut stick, and go off on my own hook, regardless of where I fetch up."

"The chances are you'd see the inside of a French prison in great shape," Jack assured him cheerfully. "Just at present they won't stand for anybody roaming about the country without the proper credentials; and you know the lack of that paper is what has been holding us up

right along. Have a little more patience, Amos, and it's going to come out all right. I've got a hunch that before sunset we may hear something pop."

"Oh! I hope so, Jack, I certainly do," said Amos dolefully.

Several more hours dragged by, and things remained just the same. Not that it could be called dull at any time in that great encampment, where thousands of the overseas contingent had taken up their temporary quarters previous to going to the fighting line and doing their bit. There was something going on all the time, something that had to do with intensive trench work, and modern methods of fighting.

Now it was instruction in bombing; a little later and the troops from the country across the ocean were being shown how to wear their odd-looking gas-masks. Without these no man is allowed in the advanced trenches, where the deadly fumes are scattered, either through the introduction of cylinders thus charged, or the explosion of gas shells. There had been built a

regular line of trenches, in which the boys in khaki daily took their places, and went through with all the routine work that would be their portion later on when they were "living the life" in stern reality.

These things had deeply interested both boys from the start, but owing to their thoughts being centred in another quarter they were beginning to tire of such sights. Amos, in particular, could think of only one thing, and this was connected with the possible coming of Pershing; all others must take a back seat in his estimation.

So four o'clock found them still waiting and anticipating, though beginning to feel a bit despondent, because "hope long deferred maketh the heart sick." Then for the seventh time they had their attention drawn to a cloud of dust away back on the well-traveled road coming up from the south. Almost languidly, as though determined not to be deceived again, Amos turned to his chum to say:

"Men on horses, at any rate, Jack; can it be another batch of troopers who've been out on a

scouting trip, to get in practice, and coming back to camp? Oh! look at that, will you, when the dust blows away and lets us see so plainly? Jack, do my eyes deceive me, or are those officers in the lead? Why, through the glasses they stand out as plain as anything, and I can see Frenchmen, and some others, surely British. Then there's a little knot of our own type of men leading them all. Here, take the glasses, and look at that man with the grim fighting face in the centre of the bunch. Jack, don't you know who that is?"

"Sure I do," laughed the other joyously, "it's Pershing!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### CUTTING THE GORDIAN KNOT

The whole camp was in a great buzz. The coming of a thousand men could not have so inspired those khaki warriors. It has always been so from time immemorial, and history is full of incidents telling of the magnetism of famous commanders, whether they be Napoleons, Alexanders, or Sheridans, whose wonderful influence inspires such confidence in their followers that a battle is really won by their presence in the field.

These Americans had been with Pershing down in Mexico. They had hiked hundreds of miles over the hot desert sands under his command. They knew what a leader they served, and one and all were ready to follow him to the death.

The grim-featured general, scanning that great camp on the soil of France, must have felt his heart glow with satisfaction as he noted the wav-

ing campaign hats, and heard the vociferous huzzas that greeted his coming.

What an honor that was to be the man selected to lead the first American army that had ever crossed the Atlantic to take part in a foreign war, now brought home to the republic in the West through the cruelty of Germany's submarine service. But General Pershing, being one of those sphinx-like men, after the type of Grant, did not betray the jubilant feeling that must have welled up in his heart. His eyes sparkled, it is true, but he simply waved his hand from time to time as he passed through the surging crowds toward Headquarters, where the general in charge of the camp awaited his coming.

Jack and Amos watched, and felt their hearts thrilled in consequence. Perhaps they may have tried to lift the curtain and looked ahead in the hope of picturing what history would write concerning this momentous epoch in the passing of the war. What was going to be the ultimate result of the coming of the great republic into the arena? Would an immense army follow Persh-

ing across the sea, an army of freemen armed for a fight to keep democracy alive, and bound to crush the autocratic ambitions of the Kaiser?

They knew that all over the land men were drafted to present themselves as candidates for training in the cantonments. Ten millions had thus been summoned, and the spirit of '76 seemed to have been once more aroused in defense of liberty and the right of men everywhere to live their own lives. With all that martial display around them it was not difficult for those two boys to imagine millions of like soldiers of Uncle Sam marching across France to help drive the German invaders back to their own country along the Rhine, perhaps even to make peace in Berlin itself, who could say?

"But what chance will *we* have to see General Pershing to-day, or even to-morrow?" Amos was saying, rather gloomily, after the camp had quieted down again, and the shouting hosts of khaki-clad men had gone about their business.

"Hold your horses," advised Jack, who had a habit of looking at things a bit more sensibly

than his impulsive companion. "He'll have a heap to attend to on this visit, though he's moving his Headquarters to a point nearby, we've learned, and will be here often now. We can easily wait until to-morrow, or even the day after, for that matter. The general promised us that he would mention our case to the commander, and that's what we've got to hang our faith on."

The afternoon passed, and nothing happened, at least nothing that concerned them. Of course, there was a great bustle around Headquarters. Aides kept coming and going in a hurry, and officers high in command gathered, as if for a consultation with General Pershing.

"I reckon there must be whole rafts of important things they've just got to settle," suggested Jack, as the pair stood afar off and watched all this. "The fact that he fetched officers of both the French and British armies with him makes it look as though they were meaning to lay out some plan of campaign; though it's too early for our boys to plunge into the fighting, because they've got a few things yet to learn."

They finally went back to the humble cottage outside the camp proper, where they had sleeping quarters, and were provided with their meals. Both were restless, and had little to say during supper, though the old couple pressed all manner of simple home-cooked food upon them.

Just as they were about through there came a smart rap at the door. Jack looked quickly at his chum, and his face betrayed eagerness. Somehow he seemed to sense coming events in that commanding military knock.

The old French peasant went to the door, to come back immediately and say:

"Eeet ees ze young messieurs zat ees wanted by ze messenger from ze general!"

The boys were out of their seats before he had finished speaking, and making at full speed for the door. There they found an aide standing stiffly, who surveyed them not a little curiously; he must have wondered who and what these young fellows might be, to have such a notable personage as General Pershing sending for them so soon after his arrival in camp.

"General Pershing will see you at Headquarters in an hour from now, as he has a little leisure," was what he told them.

"We will be there, please inform the general," said Jack, answering the salute which was tendered him, as became a wide-awake American lad who knew considerable about military customs.

No sooner had the aide departed than they seized each other's hand, and in an emphatic fashion gave vent to their surcharged feelings.

"Lucky fellows that we are, to have made such a good impression on a soldier as busy as General Pershing," said Amos, with tears in his eyes.

"It's mighty kind and thoughtful of him," added Jack, "though I mustn't forget to give our other friend, the general in command of the camp, due thanks for bringing the matter before his commander. I reckon this evening will be an off-time, and the serious business that awaits attention isn't going to be broached until morning. He wants to get us off his mind, most likely."

"So much for having an Uncle Dan who once chummed with Pershing," reflected Amos.

"Well, that may partly account for his interest," Jack hastened to add, "but on the whole I'm inclined to think he is doing this more because he took a fancy to us. Then again, I guess he feels kindly for little Mrs. Winters."

That hour was many times sixty minutes in length to both lads. They were promptly at Headquarters, and found that preparations had been made looking to their coming, since an orderly took their names in upon arrival, and almost immediately ushered them into the presence of General Pershing.

Having met him once before in Paris, they were no strangers to the fighting man who had been selected as best fitted as a representative American soldier to lead the expeditionary army in France.

He shook hands most cordially with each in turn, and his stern face lighted up with sincerity as he said in his terse fashion:

"I am very glad to see you again, Jack and

Amos. It happens that I can give you just twenty minutes before I plunge into army matters. What can I do for you this time? Before you start to tell me, I want to say I'm more than pleased with the news that has been privately passed on to me; capturing a spy, and cutting his claws before he could do any damage to our cause, ought to be another feather in your caps. But enterprising fellows like you have proved yourselves to be, probably hardly consider it worth mentioning. Now I'm ready to listen."

Jack took it upon himself to do most of the speaking, and Amos seemed very well content that it should be so. Jack always excelled in this sort of thing, for he was one of those boys who seem gifted by nature with a faculty for expressing their feelings in proper language.

He speedily explained the sort of fix they were in, and how no one seemed capable of getting them permission to go to the front. General Pershing grasped the situation easily enough. He knew that while the French officials intended complying with the simple request that had been

made upon them, they could not realize that it was a matter of any particular importance, when so many vast questions were daily coming up, requiring their utmost attention. So it was being shelved day after day, while the poor boys waited, and wondered, and felt that all their trouble in coming so far on a mission of mercy was for nothing.

Nodding his head after he had learned what was at fault, General Pershing, who always went right at the root of things, bent over the table at which he was seated and wrote hurriedly for a couple of minutes.

"There, those two documents will fix you out, I imagine, boys," he told them as he handed the papers to Jack, after affixing his signature. "I sincerely hope you will succeed in your errand, which does your brave hearts credit. If I can do anything further for you in the future let me know."

He shook hands again, and they would never forget the friendly look on his strong features as they took their leave. So speedy had been the

undertaking that the whole interview had not consumed more than ten minutes; but then that was the Pershing way of putting things through with a rush.

Naturally, after waiting so long, and making no progress, both boys were jubilant over the success of their talk with the general. Amos fairly beamed with pleasure.

"It looks now as if we might get off to-morrow," he crowed, while on the way through the tented streets of the great camp; to his mind every soldier who waved a hand to them or called out words of greeting might be congratulating them on their achievement in securing such a favor from the well beloved commander-in-chief.

"Sure thing," Jack tersely told him. "By another night, likely as not we'll be in the French camp, and hearing the thunder of big guns again."

"It's going to bring back old memories, that's certain," mused the happy Amos. "To think that such a long time has passed since we were in

the French war trenches, and even helping the Red Cross units do their work in the field hospitals. Why, it seems like ages to me, Jack."

"When we crossed the ocean going home from the Mediterranean," continued the other, also opening the pages of the past, "we never dreamed that we'd come back again to war-ridden Europe. We were sick of the horrors we had seen. How good peaceful America did look to us then, eh, Amos? Yet here we are once more in France, and bound for the front, where the fighting is going on just as fiercely as then; only now the Germans are being slowly but surely pushed back day after day, and losing tens of thousands of their best men each time. The end is in sight."

That promised to be a long and wakeful night to the two chums. Anticipations of what awaited them in the near future must have kept them from sleeping soundly, although by now such adventurous lads should have become accustomed to controlling their feelings, and mastered the art

of putting all thoughts out of their minds when lying down at night.

With the coming of dawn they were astir, eager to make such simple preparations as would be required for the start. All that was necessary for them to do was to show one of the papers which had been handed to them by the general. So they were given the privilege of riding on a Red Cross ambulance, one of a unit that was about to go to the front. In this way the two boys saw the last of the khaki city.

## CHAPTER IX

### AT THE FRONT

When Jack made the prophecy to the effect that before another sunset they might be in the French camp back of the fighting line, he had "hit the bull's-eye plumb centre." With the sun still half an hour high he and Amos found themselves standing there, listening to the thunderous crash of great guns, and seeing shells thrown from the German batteries miles distant, exploding far and near.

They were in a field hospital, the foreign unit sent from America having brought up there for business. Already those who wore Humanity's Red Cross on their arms had found much to occupy their attention, for wounded were coming in streams. An action had recently been fought, it appeared, the Germans counter-charging in a desperate attempt to wrest back certain points

which the fighting French had taken during the preceding night.

The pathetic scenes around them appealed strongly to the boys. They felt an inclination to offer their services in the work of the attendants, just as they had done on the occasion of their previous visit to the trenches; but when Amos mentioned this his companion reminded him that they were there for a definite purpose.

"It has the same fascination for me," he said, "and I would only too gladly offer to lend a hand; but we've waited so long for this hour that nothing must distract our attention from the mission that has fetched us across the ocean. Poor little Pauline has been neglected far too long, and we must learn her fate, come what will."

"You're right there, Jack," agreed the other, without hesitation, "and the sooner we go about it the better. How shall we make a start?"

"By hunting up some one in authority, and letting him see the letter General Pershing gave us," Jack replied, as though he had mapped all this out long ago. "I've already made some in-

quiries, and learned who it is we ought to see. Fortunately enough, Headquarters is only half a mile away from here, though we may have to dodge a few shells while on the road, for the batteries over yonder seem to be keeping pretty busy. They made a savage counter attack, I hear, and had heavy losses, without pushing the French out of the trench that was taken last night, so like as not the Germans feel mad, and are taking it out in using up a lot of ammunition. It's a way they seem to have of letting off steam. They say that after each and every useless attack on the part of the Crown Prince before Rheims he sends about a thousand whopping big shells into the poor wrecked city, and batters the magnificent cathedral a little more each time. But suppose we make a start. The sun is getting low, and I'd hate to be caught by darkness on the way."

Accordingly they quitted the field hospital, and struck off along the road which, in due time, they had been informed, would take them to French Headquarters, where the general high in com-

mand at that point might, in all likelihood, be found.

When they had been trudging along something like fifteen minutes, leaving the field of the Red Cross far behind them, they began to find their way beset with difficulties that might have daunted fellows less courageous. An occasional shell exploded close by, with a frightful detonation, throwing high in the air earth, stones, and it might be fragments of trees.

"Look at the road ahead there, will you, Jack?" exclaimed Amos, shortly after one of those dreadful concussions had almost stunned their hearing.

"You mean the place where the road *used* to lie," corrected Jack, "that last shell must have dropped squarely on it, and now there's a yawning aperture all of ten feet deep, making what they call a 'crater.' It was lucky for us we didn't happen to be around there when that came off."

"Let's hope lightning won't strike in the same place twice," pursued Amos, as he stared at the horrible fissure. "But what do you imagine

they're wasting all their precious ammunition for, bombarding this road, which isn't being used much, so far as I can see? I don't suppose they're bothering about such small fry as two American boys tramping along here?"

"Well, hardly," laughed Jack. "It's a mystery to me, I must admit. All I can think of is that they are doing it under a misapprehension that this road is bustling with trains of motor trucks loaded with supplies and munitions, and also with long lines of new troops coming up from Paris to take their places on the front. Once in a while those clever aviators get their signals twisted, I imagine, and so a lot of good ammunition goes to waste in riddling a lonely road, or smashing a village where not a single soldier is in hiding, and only the poor villagers cowering deep down in their cellars."

After that Amos kept a vigilant watch ahead. Several times he startled his companion by declaring that a shell was heading in their direction, but as a rule these proved to be false alarms. Once it turned out to be a hawk flying through

the air as though utterly unconcerned on account of all those fearful sounds made by the great guns and the bursting shells. On the second occasion Amos himself decided immediately that it was a distant airplane circling above the battlefield to take observations, and perhaps challenge one of the enemy to come up and fight for the supremacy of the clouds.

So they continued on their way, seeing many interesting things as they went, all tending to impress them with the frightful havoc of modern warfare as conducted by the Germans. Trees had been cut down in a wanton spirit that would have shamed savages, fruit trees that certainly could have offered no shelter to the advancing French; and houses, too, were leveled. It was as though in their desire to impress the enemy with the spirit of their resentment they meant to make the country vacated a howling wilderness, that it would take many years to repopulate and build up again.

Jack saw and shivered, for he was wondering

whether they would also find not a stone of Villefue Chateau in place. In that event how then could they expect to learn the sad fate of the brave old lady who refused to desert her ancestral home, and the little girl who was her companion?

He did not say anything of this to Amos, however, for he knew the other was inclined to look on the gloomy side of things, and it would depress his spirits.

"We're getting closer to Headquarters, you see," Amos was now saying, with a ring of satisfaction in his voice. "The good doctor at the field hospital tried to describe it to me, and I'm certain that must be the place just over yonder."

"They've tried to conceal the dugouts as much as possible with those branches, some painted canvas, perhaps, or earth thrown on top of the low roofs," Jack explained, "so as to fool the German fliers who might be looking for a mark for their guns, and would be greatly pleased to have shells dropped on Headquarters. This *camouflage* business had assumed great proportions

during the last year or so, since the airplanes have increased to tens of thousands, and can go almost anywhere. Why, I understand that there are some real artists who do not consider it beneath them to devote much of their time to getting up deceptive canvas covers to hoodwink the air-hawks. They are to be found everywhere, hiding monster howitzers, ammunition depots, and all such places where a dropped bomb might do a tremendous amount of damage."

Ten minutes afterward they were held up by a sentry who appeared unexpectedly in their path. Jack was ready, and showing his paper asked to be taken into the presence of the commander. Certain routine had to be attended to before this could be done, but in the end they faced a soldierly man whose businesslike air told that he was a fitting subordinate to the great Petain, successor of Joffre.

When he had read the letter which General Pershing had written he looked curiously at the two sturdy boys. He could hardly believe that they had come all the way across the stormy and

dangerous ocean just to search for a child. Three years of terrible war had made this fighting man look upon a single life as a grain of sand on the seashore. He had witnessed such frightful sights resulting from the cruel German occupation of alien lands that possibly the mission of the boys seemed very Quixotic in his eyes.

Nevertheless, the French general was humane, and he could honor them for their motive. Besides, he had an exalted opinion of General Pershing, who, it seemed, had made a most favorable impression on all with whom he had thus far come in contact.

"I can give you the permission you ask, my son," he told Jack, speaking the best of English, "but alas! I fear that you will have all your trouble for your pains. There is not much but ruin left of the once noble Villefue Chateau. I do not think the brave old madame has been seen for weeks, and many believe she must have perished there in those deep cellars when some shell bored its way down through all the débris. You understand that it will be a very perilous trip

for you, to venture through this disputed land, where to-day we may make a raid, and to-morrow it swarms with our enemies, hoping to surprise us and strike a blow that will cause us to reel back. Do you think you will dare venture under such conditions as I have described?"

"Indeed, General," said Jack firmly, "we are not what you would call greenhorns or novices at this sort of thing. More than two years ago we were also in your war trenches, and had a close view of the fiercest fighting. Then, too, we found a chance to assist in the field hospitals. Look, here is a paper signed by Lord Kitchener that carried us through many difficulties in those days and nights. More than this, we were fortunate enough to be at the Dardanelles when the battleship fleet bombarded the Turkish forts. Never did two boys have such glorious opportunities to witness many of the wonderful happenings of this great war. Why, I hope you will not consider that I am boasting when I say that through a strange freak of fortune we were aboard the British submarine that appeared in

the Sea of Marmora, and sunk Turkish transports, as well as bombarded the docks at Constantinople; and we lived through it all to tell the tale."

The French officer stared hard at the young speaker, whose cheeks were flushed with natural boyish pride.

"It sounds incredible," he said, "that youngsters such as you should have passed through so many astounding adventures, though I do not mean to doubt your word, young m'sieur. The fact of your possessing this precious memento of the great British general is proof enough. It seems, too, that General Pershing is your friend, and believes in you. So count on me to assist you to the extent of my power. Ask for what you will, and it shall be yours."

"Our only object just at present," explained Jack, satisfied to have won out, "is to reach the ruins of the chateau and explore it in hopes that Madame Villefue may still be alive, and with her the girl we have come to take home to her mourning mother."

"Ah! if only you could curb your impatience somewhat," he told them. "It is very probable that in another night or two we may be sending out a storming party to surprise the enemy in their dugouts, and inflict what damage we can before coming back. That would afford you an opportunity to accomplish what you seek, for while my men are doing their work the valley would be in your possession, and you could visit the chateau for an hour or more."

Amos groaned softly. He hated to think of more delay. They had met with disappointments without number ever since landing on the shores of France. Everybody seemed so much taken up with their own and the country's affairs that little or no attention could be paid to the boys' requests. Why, something might occur to hinder the contemplated stroke, or hold it back for many nights. He nudged Jack in the ribs as if to beg him not to consider the proposition if it could possibly be avoided.

Truth to tell, Jack was feeling pretty much the same way himself. Consequently he hastened

to say that they were so wrought up over the many delays with which they had met that they would appreciate it very much if the general could put them in charge of some one who knew the vicinity of the chateau.

"I can understand how you feel," the officer told them in return. "Although I do not wholly like to have you take such chances, still I shall do nothing to hinder you. It occurs to me that we have an old sergeant here with us who should know every foot of territory in this region, and particularly with regard to the Villefue Chateau grounds. At the time the war broke out he was the head gardener there, and I believe fairly worshipped the good madam. His duty was to France, and he hurried to join his regiment, since which time he has won the Cross of the Legion of Honor for his gallantry in action. In one fierce battle it was Sergeant Jean Duval who led the attack, after his colonel had gone down; and they say he will surely win his way up to the position of an officer before many more days. I

shall send him to see you, and you can make such arrangements as you please."

This was enough for Jack and Amos; indeed, they could not have asked for better. So they hastened to thank the accommodating and admiring general, and arrange it so that the sergeant would find them speedily.

They were billeted upon a neighboring shack where they found a number of junior officers, who naturally enough evinced much curiosity as to the reason of two young Americans being found in France at such a desperate time. Jack, having nothing to conceal, readily explained why they had crossed the ocean.

It proved that several of them had heard about the queer and valiant old lady who defiantly continued to live in the shadow of the shellfire. Indeed, one man told them he had even seen and conversed with the little girl, although that was a long time ago, fully six months, and he did not know whether either of them still lived.

Presently the sergeant came. He was proudly wearing his decoration, and doubtless many an

ambitious young officer who gazed on that glittering cross envied the grizzled veteran its possession. But Jack saw immediately that Sergeant Jean was going to prove the kind of man they needed in order to carry out their daring venture.

## CHAPTER X

### AFOOT IN NO MAN'S LAND

"Eet promises to be one dark night; that ees good. In two hours I will arrive, young messieurs. Eet ees well to wait until ze night settle. You can depend on Sergeant Jean to take you zere. Think you not I haf not anxious been about my good mistress? All these times and nevaire once haf I been allowed to veesit her. I am glad of thees opportunity. For ze danger, pouf! I snap ze finger at heem, me, Jean Duval!"

He proudly touched a finger to the glittering emblem that decorated his manly chest, as though the possession of that prize should prove the owner above such folly as fear. These were his last words before leaving them. They had talked matters over fully, and learned much from the one who had occupied the post of head gardener to the lovely chateau grounds.

The sergeant had heard of their mission with kindling eyes. Often had he grieved concerning the unknown fate of his former kind mistress, whom Jean loved sincerely. Faithfully had he worked year in and year out, always laboring to make his chosen task of beautifying nature his one pleasure. Then had come the call to the colors. The enemy, hated ever since '71, had again crossed the border, and threatened fair France with subjugation. Jean, like hundreds of thousands of other patriots, had thrown down the hoe and spade, said good-bye to the scenes he loved, and offered himself on the altar of his country, a willing sacrifice.

The boys liked him from the first. He was a simple man, but as true as steel. It pleased them to know they would have such a safe guide in their rash errand to No Man's Land, where death lurked nightly and every rod of ground had been fought over time and again, so that the soil was fairly reddened with the life blood of countless numbers from both sides.

They had little preparation to make. All that

was needed was their grim determination to go to almost any lengths before giving over the attempt to find little Pauline Winters.

True to his word, the soldier was at the door when the time had elapsed. Accustomed to facing perils he seemed to think little or nothing of this fresh enterprise. Indeed, the chances were the intrepid sergeant had by now become so accustomed to feeling his pulses thrill that he actually gloried in this opportunity for action, this opening for once more matching his wits against those of the "Boches," as, like all other Frenchmen, he contemptuously called the Germans.

So they started forth, followed by the good wishes of all the young officers who were quartered in the concealed shack. From their manner it was plainly to be seen that some of them envied the boys this chance to acquit themselves with credit in the courts of war. If Jack had called for volunteers to accompany him in his dangerous errand not one of those impulsive young Frenchmen but would have striven to be of the number.

There would be no moon until long after midnight, when, perhaps, they might see a fragment rising in the east; for it was now well on toward the end of its monthly journey, and would soon be gone entirely. This suited Jack exactly, for light would have been fatal to his plans.

As their eyes became accustomed to the gloom they found that they could see to some extent, though only in a limited measure. The white road lay before them, and so far Jean seemed to be sticking to it. At any minute, though, Jack anticipated he would turn aside and plunge into the wild undergrowth that had been torn and racked by bursting shells and the plunging shots from rapid-fire guns, until it was a perfect chaos.

They moved slowly. There was no need of any haste, and it was far better to keep on the safe side. From time to time star shells sent up by the Germans would burst high in the air and for a brief period illuminate the earth below. These the boys understood were exploded with the idea of enabling those who held glasses to examine as much of the ground as they could.

This was done so as to determine whether any serious operation in force was being engineered by the enterprising Frenchmen, who managed to keep the enemy guessing concerning their next move—it was called "getting on his nerves," and was calculated to break down the German *morale.*

Occasional shots were fired from some of the more distant big guns, as if it were a religious duty to send a shell screaming toward the enemy works at certain periods throughout the livelong night. Other sounds, also connected with war's alarms, came to the ears of the boys as they pushed steadily on. Strangely enough, during a brief pause between these disturbing noises Jack caught the plain hoot of an owl, coming from some old tree nearby, or from a ruined belfry of a village church. He would never forget how queer it seemed to catch that well remembered mournful note, at such a time, when a myriad of soldiers vied with each other in the effort to produce all sorts of discordant sounds.

Everywhere lay signs of desolation. Little

had been spared to proclaim that happy homes had once dotted this landscape, merry children gone to and from school, farms and gardens made a pleasing sight to the eye, and happy people gone about their daily tasks with contented minds.

Several times they passed the ruins of humble homes by the roadside. It seemed as though the invaders must have taken a cruel delight in shattering these places of dwelling so that even a wretched dog could hardly have found shelter there. It may have been done in order to force the inhabitants to go hence, and leave the scene to the contending armies; but Jack believed there was a much less humane motive back of the vandalism.

Between the hostile trenches there lay some two miles and more of country, and neither side could claim this with any degree of accuracy. Sometimes it was dominated by the French, and again the Germans would overrun its entire length.

Again and again did Amos pull at the sleeve

of his companion, and mutely point to some object that had attracted his attention. It was close alongside the road that these strange-looking mounds seemed to always lie. Jack understood. Here some unfortunate soldier was taking his last sleep, having given his life for his country, no matter whether that might be heroic France, or the land of the Rhine. In some instances a little fragment of stone had been placed at one end of the oblong mound. Possibly, had it been daylight, they might have read some sort of brief inscription on these rude tablets, a memorial placed there by comrades of the one who lay beneath the sod.

All these gruesome things affected Amos not a little, nor could he be blamed for having a little cold chill occasionally pass over him. He felt almost as though he were passing through a cemetery, so numerous were the graves; it seemed as if the roadside were a favorite place to inter the dead, where every passerby in days to come, when peace might again live in the land, could see, and read, and pay homage to those

who had given all they possessed in the service of their country. Amos told himself that instead of calling it No Man's Land they should have said Dead Men's Land.

Thus far nothing out of the common had happened to give them uneasiness. If there were German detachments roving about, bent on some desperate enterprise, they had not as yet had the ill luck to meet with any. Amos hoped sincerely that their good fortune would continue to the end, whether they found little Pauline, or were forced to give over the search.

Jack encouraged him to believe that they must win out. He had pointed to their record of the past, which was not sullied by a single defeat, even though success may have been long delayed in some cases. So Amos had his courage bolstered up by the optimism of his chum, who would not admit that there was such a word as *fail* "in the bright lexicon of youth."

"Do you think we can be nearly there, Jack?" queried Amos presently, for he rested in conviction that they had covered more than a mile.

"I was asking that of Jean," his comrade told him cautiously, "and he said we were about halfway. You see, we are moving in a diagonal line across the valley, and that makes it somewhat longer. But everything must come to an end. At least we are getting along swimmingly, and without any trouble."

Amos relapsed once more into his former programme of keeping silent. He knew what to expect now, and could therefore adapt himself to the conditions confronting him. Given another period of say fifteen or twenty minutes, and they might expect to arrive at their intended destination.

So Amos busied himself in trying to imagine what the ruins of the noble chateau would look like, with the merciless imprint of the Hun's mailed fist stamped upon its displaced stones. He was coming to hate more and more all the ways of the unrelenting foe of humanity, as he saw what terrible misery had been wrought upon innocent sufferers through that policy of frightfulness. He really rejoiced with a fierce satis-

faction that free America had at last been compelled to throw her mighty forces into the world-wide game in order to stand for all she loved and honored.

These ponderings on the part of Amos came to a sudden halt. Sergeant Jean had uttered a low, sibilant hiss of warning. Something was abroad in the valley of desolation on this dark night. They could now hear the sound of many feet on the road, and approaching from the direction of the enemy trenches. That could only mean they must be German raiders on their way to try and surprise the French. Wherefore, the sooner they concealed themselves from view the better chance they had of living.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE HEAVY HAND OF THE HUN

"Duck!" whispered Jack.

Whether or not Sergeant Jean fully understood the meaning of that Americanism, at least he realized that it was a time for disappearing. Those who were coming along the road were, of course, German forces, since the French would not be heading from that quarter.

Accordingly, the three dodged to one side, seeking friendly shelter where they could lie in hiding until the peril had gone by. Fortune was kind in that there happened to be a nice little deposit of bushes very conveniently situated for their purpose.

Into this they speedily crawled, each wriggling along until positive that there was no chance of his extremities being stumbled over, or seen by those who passed along the road. In concealing themselves, the two boys did not fail to so arrange it that they could manage to twist their

necks and look back toward the roadway, though whether they could distinguish anything was a problem yet to be solved.

Closer still came the steady plodding. They knew many feet must be making that singular trampling sound; and that they were soldiers, long drilled to walking in unison until it had become second nature with them, could be readily guessed.

Amos only hoped with all his heart that no one had heard any movement which they may have made while crawling under cover. His heart beat faster than usual the closer the sounds drew, for he realized that they were about to pass through the first crisis.

In his previous experiences Amos had seen considerable of the brutal way in which German soldiers are taught to treat those who by the fortunes of war fall into their hands. He knew they do not believe in anything but the sternest measures, that many times border on savagery. So Amos had no desire to find himself a prisoner in the power of the Kaiser's fighting men. Why,

if they discovered the two young Americans in company with a man wearing the French blue, and hiding in such a suspicious manner amidst the bushes, they might think to treat them as spies, and give them all a short shrift. Sometimes Germans have been known to act on the principle that they cannot be bothered with prisoners, who have to be constantly fed and guarded, when both food and men were mighty scarce throughout the Empire.

So Amos felt a bit chilly when he saw some dark object coming steadily forward. While he could not make it out to be anything but a mass of figures, still his lively imagination was able to supply the rest, and picture the stalwart Brandenburgers, the Saxons, or the men from Baden who were heading for the French salient they intended to bomb.

Now they were passing by, steadily, and bunched close together. Not a word was spoken, not a clinking of accoutrements did he hear. All that came to his ear was the rhythmic plodding of heavy feet, moving on and on.

One minute and then another elapsed, with the mass of men still passing. Why, there seemed several hundred of the "storming party," as special units chosen for this desperate work are called, made up of the flower of the army, men who are known to have a perfect contempt for death—"daredevils," they would be called in English, though the Germans have another name for them that answers about the same thing.

Now the last of them had drifted by. The sound of their footsteps began to die away in the near distance as they passed from the scene.

Amos drew a free breath again. He felt relieved in knowing that they had escaped that danger. Still, it was not an altogether pleasant thought to know that they were separated from their French friends and allies by all those hard fighters. Before the night grew old they might be unfortunate enough to run up against a batch of the bombing party, returning to their lines after contact with the defenders of the projecting salient.

Sergeant Jean began to push his way out of

the bushes, for they could no longer hear the slightest sound of the German forces, and the coast seemed clear. A minute later and the three again stood on the road, with the way open before them.

"Seems as if this might be the German night to occupy No Man's Land, eh, Jack?" ventured Amos, as they once more started onward, in close formation, and ever on the alert for fresh signs of danger.

"Just as like as not," the other admitted, "though you never can tell. It may be the poilus will turn the table on the Boches, and chase them back this way long before midnight. That's the way it's been going on, give and take. Always the casualties count heavy in the morning. The more dead Germans, the sooner this war will be over. That's what the French and British have said for two years."

Amos understood what the other meant by his whispered words. He had read much of how the Allies counted on the terrible menace of attrition to weaken the lines of the enemy. They were

numerically twice as strong as the Central Empires, and could afford to lose man for man.

Amos had often figured it out himself, and along original lines. He likened it to a game of checkers, where the rules force an exchange when opponents face each other. If one manages to get a single point ahead he can demand an even exchange all along, until in the end the number on both sides has been reduced so that the odds stand *two to one!*

Amos was pondering this subject as he trotted along beside the other two, with the night shadows all around them, and unknown perils possibly hovering over their heads. He believed in it, too, though despairing of any speedy solution of the war problem through such means, knowing the obstinate nature of the German people as he did.

Some little time passed, and they were drawing very close in the vicinity of the chateau. Sergeant Jean could be seen craning his neck and staring eagerly ahead, as though anticipating making a pleasing discovery at any moment.

If anything, the evidences of wanton destruction around them had increased the farther they penetrated the valley; the craters formed by the exploding shells of enormous calibre grew more numerous, so that more than once they had to leave the roadway and pass around a gaping aperture. Even those queer little mounds that told such a sad story had increased in number, lying here, there and everywhere by the roadside. Fighting must have been pretty brisk around this section, Amos concluded, on taking note of these significant facts. Villefue Chateau must have been a favorite site for parties belonging to both armies, a regular bone of contention indeed, now in the hands of one side, and anon being taken by the other, the advantage swaying back and forth after the varying whims of war.

"At last we haf errive at ze place!" Amos heard the French guide muttering, and this heartened him very much indeed, because he was growing weary of that continual forward movement. Every yard passed over took them farther away from their friends, and so much near-

er the hostile lines, where men lay in touch with quick-firing guns, ready to pour a hailstorm of missiles into any moving object that could not answer a challenge in German.

Sergeant Jean had left the road and was stooping alongside. It was plain that he had discovered something he recognized. Both boys followed after him and found that the Frenchman was fumbling over what seemed to be a smashed section of a once massive stone wall. It had been ruthlessly thrown down, and the stones so scattered, that of a truth it might be said that not one rested on another.

Moving along foot by foot Jean was grumbling to himself at this evidence of wanton destruction. He could see the work of the Hun in every poor stone that lay by itself alongside the road. No falling shell had worked this riot of demolition; it must have been deliberately accomplished under orders, so that the wall might not offer any concealment to those clever sharpshooters of the French. Truly the barbarous hand of

War had fallen heavily in this once charming region.

Thus muttering vindictively to himself, because he had not dreamed that such a catastrophe could happen to the spot he had known and loved so long, Sergeant Jean continued to advance. He was now bending eager glances over to one side. Amos could guess without half trying that the old gardener must be anticipating catching his first indistinct glimpse of the chateau towers. There was, however, but little heavenly illumination to assist him, those star shells sent up by the Germans having ceased ascending, since they did not wish to betray their comrades who were making the attack.

Not seeing anything as soon as he had hoped, terror was beginning to grip Jean's honest soul; he feared that the fate of the poor wall might also have overtaken the noble stone building that had sheltered the Villefues for much more than a century, perhaps several of them.

Jack, too, began to feel nervous. They were now on the point of learning whether their mis-

sion to France was to be crowned with success, or failure; and it would be only natural for the boys to quiver with suspense when so much depended on the events of the next half hour.

They no longer stayed by the road, but the guide had trailed off to the left, as though determined to take a short-cut, and thus speedily learn the worst. Trees lay upon the ground, trees that had taken a hundred years and more to attain their late dimensions. Some had fallen victims to the passage of hurtling shells; but upon others could be found the marks of the keen axe. Jean learned this dreadful fact by feeling the stumps caressingly. Each one of those noble trees was embalmed in his memory. How often had he wandered beneath their welcome shade, coming from the adjoining garden to cool off after a spell of toil! Oh! it was bitter for the old gardener to realize that ruin alone marked what had been one of the most beautiful estates in Northern France.

Amos, waiting with his heart apparently in his throat, heard the guide give vent to an ejacula-

tion that at least had a faint ring of satisfaction about it.

"Zere ees one of ze towers standing!" he breathed through his bristling mustache, "only ze one, do you mind? Oh, ze savages, ze barbarians, well do zey deserve zat name of ze Hun! Look, young messieurs, what do you see but ze ruin of zat noble chateau? Zere are ze walls, but all hollow wizin. It ees but a shell zat remains!"

He almost groaned this, so deep was his bitter resentment. No doubt, as he gazed on the sickening scene, Jean was thinking of the happy times he had passed there in those days that were gone, and would never return.

Looking up at the towering walls that had such a ghostly appearance as seen in the faint starlight, Amos was forcibly reminded of pictures depicting such ancient ruins as the Coliseum at Rome, or possibly the excavations at Pompeii. It was hard to believe that only a short time before this mass of shaky, roofless walls had been

known as the most perfect specimen of architecture in the northern part of France.

But, after all, this was no time to give way to sentiment. They had stern work ahead of them, and the sooner they started to investigate what the ruins contained, the better both boys would be satisfied. Was Madame Villefue yet alive, and with her little Pauline, or would they come upon a gruesome discovery that must chill their very souls?

## CHAPTER XII

### HOW A CRUEL FATE CHEATED JEAN

The task that confronted them was no trifling one, nor was it without its share of danger. Even in the daytime one would have to be careful about prowling in and out of that ruin. The walls were undoubtedly tottering, and even the remaining tower could not be any too securely anchored; it was apt to come crashing down, to crush every living object on which the mass of stones and masonry might descend.

These difficulties were more than doubled by the fact that the search must be carried on while darkness held sway. Jack had foreseen this in part, and prepared for the solution of the problem. Making diligent inquiries, he had discovered that he could borrow an electric hand-torch. While the illumination cast by this might be exceedingly limited in its scope, nevertheless "half a loaf was better than no bread," and Jack had joyfully accepted the loan of the little contraption.

This he now produced and turned on. A startled exclamation from old Jean caused Jack to remember that as yet he had not thought to say anything about the light, and its sudden application must have considerably staggered the guide. Discovering what had caused the flash, he immediately told Jack it was a clever thought to provide some means for picking their way amidst the wreckage.

Had the boys been left to themselves, they would never have known how to go about the task of exploring the ruined chateau, or of finding where the entrances to the cellars lay. Fortunately for them, Jean was well posted along those lines, and also eager to serve.

They entered, and started to pick their way gingerly through the mass of fallen stones and broken furniture. Had an earthquake occurred, it could hardly have made a more complete job of wrecking the chateau. Amos noted the fact that such fragments of furniture that were visible bore the marks of massive luxury. No doubt they were family relics handed down through

successive generations of Villefues, but now, alas! brought to the end of their usefulness.

Having heard many stories about the eager way in which the invading Germans, particularly the officers commanding, had sequestrated and sent back home all manner of costly pictures, ornaments, valuables, and such furniture as they could conveniently ship, Amos had no doubt but that the chateau had been systematically looted before the work of actual destruction began.

They had hardly started making their way through the débris when there came a most chilling cry that sent the blood back to the heart of Amos with a rush. Standing there as though frozen to the spot, he must have mentally pictured all sorts of evil things about to happen, from some wild beast pouncing on them to the appearance of a band of taunting Uhlans, into whose trap the trio had unconsciously walked.

"Haf no fear, young messieurs," came the steady voice of Jean, "eet ees ze evil bird of ze night zat always hangs around ze ruins. Many times I, Jean Duval, haf myself heard zat cry,

even in ze sacred churchyard over in our leetle village zat ze Boches zey haf wipe off ze map. Eet ees all right, I say; so let us again proceed."

Amos only hoped that bird of evil omen, possibly a night-jay, he fancied, would take wing and fly away. He disliked the thought of having to hear it give vent to its discordant note from time to time, startling him because of the fact that his nerves were "all on edge."

They made further progress, only to have another interruption. This time it came with a vengeance indeed, for without any warning there broke out the most hideous aggregation of sounds without exception that Amos could ever remember having heard. Chief among them he caught the heavy and often half-muffled reports of what he imagined must be bombs being discharged. Then there were loud shouts, and every kind of other report, even to the rattle of a quick-firer.

"Whew! They didn't lose any time about it, let me tell you that!" cried Jack, who understood without being told that this meant the German

storming party had struck their initial blow, having invaded the French trenches at the point they had marked for assault.

Standing there, they were listening to the conglomeration of weird sounds borne to their ears on the night air. Some of the German big guns took up the chorus, undoubtedly with the design of adding to the racket, and keeping the enemy guessing as to what was really intended. If they could make the French believe a general attack all along the line was in progress, it would have the effect of keeping them from hurrying sufficient reinforcements to the affected spot, thus giving the storming party of raiders abundant time to accomplish their work and return.

Sergeant Jean was writhing as he listened, writhing in mental anguish, and Jack could guess why. The old chap felt deeply pained to know that when he was absent from his accustomed post those Boches had taken it upon themselves to plan their night attack. It was aimed directly at the place where duty had chained him, up to the

hour he had been placed in charge of this expedition into No Man's Land.

Only for that unfortunate happening he, Jean Duval, might at that moment be in the midst of the mad mêlée, taking his toll of the invading Germans, and striking another blow for his beloved France! Yes, it was indeed sad, according to the way a loyal Frenchman looked at things in those stirring days. But then Jean was philosophical. There would still be plenty of Boches to go around, and some other time luck might again favor him.

He shrugged his broad shoulders, gave his grizzly mustache a fierce tug, and once more started calmly to lead the eager boys on. But ever and anon Jack saw him raise his head and listen to the clamorous voices of battle, as though his soul yearned to be there doing his duty by his sorely stricken country.

Now they had arrived at what gave promise of turning out to be a flight of massive stone steps. They led downward, so Jack could under-

stand that in all probability they would take them to the subterranean part of the ancient castle.

Some difficulty was encountered in passing the rubbish that had partly choked the way. From this the boy drew a conclusion to the effect that it would be next to impossible for an aged lady, or even a nimble child, to have surmounted such an obstacle. Unless there turned out to be another means of exit, he greatly feared they would not find the objects of their search beyond the foot of those steps.

Jean was possessed of a giant's strength, and this he exerted with such good results that a passage was speedily opened for his companions. Making use of his hand-torch to pierce the veil of utter gloom that lay like a pall beyond, Jack was able to see that one of the cellars, mentioned so often in connection with the lady remaining in her chateau through all the terrific bombardment, was revealed before them.

It was with considerable trepidation that he turned the light this way and that. Once he glimpsed what seemed to be a huddled mass upon

the dank stone floor of the cellar, and his heart turned cold with a dreadful fear. As he looked more closely, Jack to his relief found that it was only a doubled-up mattress, carried to the underground spot for some purpose, and left there.

It was a cavernous place, and Jean would not consider himself satisfied until they had gone entirely around it. Amos was looking pretty blank about that time, for he very naturally labored under the belief that this spelled the end for them and their wonderful plans. Since the cellar was devoid of human occupancy, and of course no one could dream of trying to live amidst the wreckage marking the interior of the chateau, why, of course, there was nothing to be done but give it up, and confess that for once he and Jack had failed.

"Well, they're not here, that's sure, Jack," he said, for down under the surface of the earth they could actually talk without raising their voices to a shout, because the racket from the French trenches did not penetrate so strongly.

"We've proved that to our satisfaction, I'm sure," the other confessed.

"What shall we do next?" questioned Amos, plainly bewildered again, and hoping that Jack could throw some light on the gloomy prospect that faced them. "Must we go back to the camp, like dogs with their tails between their legs, beaten; or can we search around here yet a while? Maybe Jean might know of some other hiding place not far away, where the old lady would think to go?"

"Oh, cheer up, Amos; we're not near through here yet!" Jack told him. "This is only one of the three big cellars under the place."

"You put new heart in me when you say that, Jack, old fellow!" cried the other exultantly. "Then we've still got two more chances ahead of us. I guess it's going to come out all right. Is there a connecting door between the different cellars, Sergeant Jean?"

"I am sorry to say zat eet ees not so, young m'sieur," the guide confessed. "Nevaire haf I been able to understand why zat same zing haf

not been accomplished; but each cellar eet must be enter through ze separate door. But we shall soon know all, and zis exquisite suspense eet may be of ze past. Let us try anuzzer. We will not give up ze hope till ze last it haf been explore."

Once more they made their way up past the rubbish that half choked the passage. Upon arriving at the top of the steps they could hear the savage riot of sounds more plainly than before. Amos wondered whether the breeze had really freshened while they were below, or if the battle for the salient could have taken on a new ferocity.

He watched Jean, as though possibly the answer might come from him. The veteran of three years of intense warfare would know how to gauge those mingled sounds. Plainly Sergeant Jean was growing more and more interested. He cocked his head to one side, and strained his hearing, while nervously fumbling at the stick he had been using to guide his footsteps in the darkness, as though he half imagined it to be his favorite gun, and expected presently to

be called upon to make use of the same in cutting off more of the hated Germans.

"Aha! zey haf bitten off more zan zey can chew, zose silly Boches!" Amos heard him saying. "Ze brave poilu he haf been sit up, and wait for ze enemy. Pouf! he ees not in any running humor zis night except it be to run *after* ze retreating enemy. Oh! to zink I am not zere while all zat fun ees going on. It break ze heart to know zere are Germans to kill, and Jean Duval he haf not a part in eet."

The poor old chap certainly did seem to be very downhearted because Fate had played him such a scurvy trick. Amos found himself feeling sympathetic, and almost wished they had waited until the following night to try out their plan.

"But wishing will not mend matters, Sergeant Jean," said Jack. "It stands to reason that you will live to have another whack at the enemy, perhaps it may be to-morrow night, when the French have their turn to attack. So let us be at work. Two more cellars await our attention, you said; show us the entrance to the first of these."

Recalled thus to a sense of his present duty, Jean apparently tried to put the fact of his bitter disappointment out of his mind, though the jumble of sounds that told of fierce fighting not far away continued to assail their ears all the time they were creeping cautiously over the masses of débris that filled the interior of the ruined chateau. So did Jean lead them to yet another flight of stone steps that ran downward into a vast pit of darkness and unknown mysteries; and using his little light to the best advantage Jack followed close on the guide's heels as he started to descend.

## CHAPTER XIII

### AT THE RUINED CHATEAU

"What a queer smell comes up from there," remarked Amos, as they commenced to make their way down the slippery stone steps. "If you asked me, I'd say we were going to look in at a pickling bin, for it's vinegary enough."

"Ah!" said Jean, who heard what the curious Amos was saying, "zat ees easily explain, young m'sieur. Eet ees ze wine cellar we are now about to explore."

"Then I wasn't far off in my guess after all," retorted the boy, "since wine and vinegar are cousins. But I reckon this was a favorite place for the Germans to hang out at, up to the time they smashed things so lively."

Jean was saying something to himself which neither of the others quite caught, but they could easily imagine that his remarks were not very complimentary to the men of the Kaiser, for he

certainly mentioned the word "pigs" several times with increased emphasis.

Reaching the bottom of the steps they could see the interior of the wine cellar. It presented anything but an attractive picture. The former custodian would have groaned could he have looked upon it now, after the thirsty Germans had come and gone.

Everywhere lay broken bottles and jugs. Barrels, too, had been smashed in by the head, as though the dry throats of the pillagers could not wait long enough for their liquid contents to trickle through the customary faucets, when buckets were needed in order to quench the raging thirst, and time was a factor in the game. Straw lay scattered around, torn from baskets that had once contained the choicest vintages from the champagne district, now gone to please the taste of the invader more accustomed to imbibing hop beer.

Jack wandered amidst all this mass of material hoping that he might yet discover those he sought. He even went so far as to call the name

"Pauline" several times, but there came no response.

"It's no use, they're not here," he observed, when he had been the full rounds of the cellar without finding any one.

"That means two chances are gone," grunted Amos dejectedly. "We've only got a single one left."

"Too soon to give up hope yet," Jack told him. "Remember how we used to write in our copy-books at school that slogan 'nil desperandum.' We're not knocked out yet, and I don't mean to own up beaten until I've learned the fate of the Madame, and also little Pauline Winters."

"With all this straw lying around loose here," observed Amos, "I'm only wondering how it comes the Germans didn't strike a match, and set the whole thing going up in smoke."

"I reckon," Jack told him, "they keep thinking there may still be a bottle that had escaped the sack of the wine cellar. Every time a crowd drops in here they search all this stuff over again, in hopes of finding something worth while. Some

day one of them will get so mad at being disappointed that he'll start a fire going."

"It couldn't do much harm," commented Amos. "The place is in ruins now, and will never be rebuilt, I imagine. But there is one more cellar, Jean said. Oh! I certainly do hope that won't fail us. The third strike means down and out, you know, on the diamond, and it'll hit us about as hard right now."

"Lead us to it, Sergeant Jean," Jack suggested.

"What sort of a place is the last cellar; and do you have any hope that we may strike a clue there?" begged Amos.

"I haf ze great pleasure of telling you zat I build my hopes on ze last place. Eet would nevaire do to explore ze best first, for zen what disappointment to know ze slim chance zat remain! A Frenchman he always keeps ze best to last."

"I'm glad to know it!" exclaimed Amos, plucking up fresh courage, for he was in a frame of mind when even the slightest things swayed him one way or the other.

They made their way up from the wine cellar, where so much of the fluid contents of those broken bottles and casks had been spilled by clumsy fingers that the whole stone floor was soaked, and many gallons must have actually run down through the gratings in the corners.

The boys anticipated hearing a continuation of the clamor over toward the French trenches, once they emerged from the subterranean retreat, and in this they were not at all disappointed. Louder than before came the outcries, but even Amos was quickly aware of the fact that their tenor had changed since the last time they stood amidst the ruins of the chateau and listened.

No longer did they hear the dull explosion which both had attributed to bombs hurled into dugouts and other retreats, so as to force the inmates to emerge and meet their fate. The chorus now seemed to be almost wholly made up of wild shouts, accompanied by the rattle of fire-arms. There was even a change in the character of the outcries, for they did not come in deep bass voices, but rather high screechy tones.

Jack was the first to say anything concerning this transformation, and of course, he directed his remarks to Jean, since it was that party who would be most likely to know what it signified.

"What news, my friend?" he demanded. "There has been quite a change since we went down into that wine cellar, or else perhaps those fumes have gone to my head. Why all this wild whooping, and who is making the night hideous with such cries? Have the Germans succeeded in capturing your trenches? You said your men had not been caught sleeping; then why such a terrible din of shouting?"

Jean smote himself upon his broad chest, and Jack could not but notice how he seemed to draw in a most tremendous breath, as though pride gripped him in its toils.

"Eet ees so, young m'sieur," he hurriedly explained. "Ze slow-witted German he ees not able to hold what he bite off. Ze nimble poilu drive him out of ze trench, by gar! Listen to heem shout ze huzzah. Veectory it say to me, veectory over ze hated Boche. Often haf I myself,

Jean Duval, almost burst ze blood-vessel in shouting like zat. Oh! zey hit hard, and believe me zey haf ze Boches on ze wild run. I haf always say zat ze pitcher may go to ze well once too often."

He was fairly bristling with happiness over the wonderful thing that had happened. Usually it takes an hour, perhaps two, after an assault before sufficient reinforcements can be summoned to make a successful counter attack; yet here the watchful French had actually turned on the foe and bayoneted him out of the works almost before he got his bombs fairly started.

Although anxious to settle their own affair as soon as possible both boys found a sort of fascination in standing there and listening to the clamor arising. They enjoyed seeing the old Frenchman acting so happy over it all. Knowing that it meant the arrogant Germans were "getting their medicine," as Amos would say, possibly the one-time gardener of the estate might even look upon all that destruction without feeling his heart burning within him. With each loud burst

of wild hurrahing some of the disgrace was being wiped out. Revenge is sweet to a Frenchman at all times.

"They must be chasing them through the valley, I should say," Amos suggested, to show that he could figure out things once in a while.

"The Germans are surely on the run," Jack added. "They went up to the attack full two hundred strong. I wonder how many of that fine bunch will ever get back to their own lines again?"

"Not one, eef my compatriots haf zere way," exultantly cried Jean, stabbing with that stout stick of his, as no doubt he had done many a time when a sharp-pointed sabre-bayonet decorated the end of his gun, and he found himself beset by the charging foes.

Even Amos found himself quivering under some strange sort of excitement, with all those sounds of battle throbbing on the night air that was hardly to be wondered at. Did he not come of fighting stock, his father having been a colo-

nel and a friend of Kitchener in days of old in Egypt?

After what he had seen of the German way of making a howling wilderness out of a pleasant valley, Amos felt as though he would not worry if that confident prediction on the part of Jean did actually come true, so that not a single member of the storming party ever got back again to their own lines. Time was when he had felt a great respect for German thoroughness and thrift; but lately he was beginning to fear that their suddenly discovered lust for world dominion was going to outweigh all their excellent qualities.

Jack remembered that they had been about to seek the entrance of the third and last remaining cellar at the time their halt was made to listen to the medley of thrilling sounds.

Turning the glow of his little hand-torch upon Sergeant Jean he found, as he anticipated, that the Frenchman had again turned his best ear toward the region from whence the turmoil sprang. It must possess a dreadful fascination

for the old war-horse, as the trumpet sounding the charge will cause a colonel's fiery mount to break away and run madly with the rest of the troop. The outcries from the throats of his mates and the sound of their guns crackling in chorus, acted upon Jean's heart very much as the violinist's bow plays upon the taut strings of the instrument, for it was all sweetest music, in his estimation.

Jack, believing that it was up to him to budge the other, no longer hesitated to speak. Jean could not look at things with their eyes. The finding of poor little Pauline, the waif of the wrecked valley, did not assume such vast importance in his estimation as with those who had come thousands of miles, and even risked the dangers of submarine-infested seas, for the one purpose of fetching her back to her heart-broken mother.

"We would go on, Sergeant Jean, and finish our search," he suggested pointedly. "It is all very fine to hear your comrades chasing those Boches through the valley, and we hope they get

every lasting one of them; but please do not forget how my companion and myself have a sacred duty to perform. So lead us into that last underground retreat, that we may learn the best or the worst that awaits us."

Then it was Jean Duval burst out afresh, and both boys were thrilled to hear what he had to say.

"Alas! eet ees too bad, young messieurs, but fortune eet does not yet favor us, you see. Those Boches zey are on ze run like ze wind, but eet happen zat zey think to make for ze chateau, so as to use zese walls for holding my compatriots at ze bay!"

"What's that, Jean?" cried Amos excitedly, "do you mean to tell us the Germans are heading in this direction, and probably mean to actually try to find shelter behind these staggering walls? Why, that would spoil all our plans, wouldn't it? How could we continue the hunt for Madame Villefue and Pauline if there's going to be a big bunch of the Boches around here, interfering with our game?"

"I tell you zey are coming zis way, and coming fast," the sergeant assured him. "Eef ze Zouaves zey be at the heels of ze rabbits you can see for yourselves zey must find heem shelter queek, and where could a better fortress be found zan here?"

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE UNDERGROUND REFUGE

"Then we've got to be hustling, if we don't want to get cooped up here!" burst out Amos, as though he expected that the guide would immediately order a retreat.

Even Jack was thinking along the same lines. They need not go so very far away, and after the Germans had eventually abandoned the ruins it might be possible for them to return and continue their search.

When, however, he ventured to suggest something along these lines he was astonished to hear Sergeant Jean make objections.

"I beg zat you leave zis to me, young messieurs," he said earnestly. "I haf ze knowledge of zis place. Eet will be all right, I gif you my word—I, Jean Duval, who haf been granted ze lofely Cross of ze Legion of Honor. Ees eet a bargain, and will you trust ze old man?"

"Do anything you think best, Jean," said Jack promptly.

"We're ready to follow you through thick and thin," added Amos nervously. "I guess we had better be making haste. Some of the Boches will be getting here in a hurry."

"Good! Zere will be no trouble. Eferyzing is arrange. Old Jean he haf not been is ze service here feefty year, and not know ze secret! Eet was ze good madame herself zat take me into ze confidence. I will show you how easy eet work."

"Bully for you, Jean!" exclaimed Amos rapturously, making up his mind that in all likelihood something quite out of the ordinary was about to be disclosed.

Indeed, there seemed to be an air of delightful mystery connected with the words and manner of the old gardener. Amos had done much reading, and fancied that all of these very ancient castles and chateaus must have all manner of amazing secret passages and such things connected with them, souvenirs of the past. So Amos

was well primed for almost anything, and as he started to follow the old guide he was telling himself under his breath not to be surprised at whatever happened.

Plainly Jean was aiming to take them underground again, judging from the way he threaded a passage among the piles of fallen stones and other débris. Amos remembered that there had been talk of *three* separate cellars, and that thus far they had been through but two. That would leave yet another unexplored, and he fancied they would be seeing what it looked like inside of another minute or so.

Indeed, his guess turned out to be a good one. Jean was now at the head of another flight of stone steps. Looking down they could see nothing there save a dense, appalling blackness. Amos shuddered as he stared, it seemed so uncanny, so uncertain, and with such possibilities of evil.

Supposing they did hide down there, what would happen to them in case the Germans discovered their presence? He could anticipate that

it would not be very pleasant for himself and chum. Just then he found himself remembering that the attacking Teutons had been called a bombing party, which meant that they had depended almost wholly on the use of gas bombs in order to drive the French out of their retreats. How easy it would be for them to hurl a few of those terrible missiles down into the third cellar, thus obviating the necessity for rushing the underground retreat in person at the risk of their lives.

Amos had heard much about the dreadful results following the release of the poisonous fumes contained in those fiendishly contrived bombs. German chemistry had always been famous during the years before the war, for producing all manner of wonderful acids, and gasses, and everything connected with laboratory work; and those who had suffered from the latest poison gas told stories of its effects that must chill the blood.

They had no gas masks to don in a hurry, Amos remembered with dismay, and hence must

fall easy victims to the pungent fumes, once these were released through the explosion of the bombs containing them.

He had to shut his teeth hard together and summon his resolution to the fore when he saw that Jean was actually starting down those slippery stone steps. Jack showed no hesitation about following his lead; Jack seemed to have the utmost confidence in the French soldier's given word, and why should he, Amos, falter?

So he forced himself to take the first step. After he had got his heavy feet started it was not quite so hard, though poor Amos half fancied he was breathing the fresh air for the last time.

It was terrible work dropping down into all that darkness without even a ray of light to guide them. Amos wished Jack would remember he had that friendly electric hand-torch along, and make use of it; for they certainly never would need its feeble illumination more. For some good and sufficient reason Jack refrained from doing this. Perhaps he was waiting until they were

quite swallowed up in the underground retreat. He may have feared lest the glow should be caught by some oncoming German, whose suspicions would on that account be aroused.

Step by step they went down. Jean only spoke once, and then to warn the boys to watch their feet lest they slip and have a bad tumble. There was much danger of this on account of the fact that the steps were damp and partly covered with green moss. Both lads were sure-footed, and took especial pains not to meet with any mishap while descending.

Now they were at the base of the short flight. Amos heaved a sigh of relief. At the same time he was pleased to see that Jack had pressed his thumb on the little notch of his torch, causing its ray to shoot straight out.

Swinging the light this way and that, Jack took his first observation. This cellar was larger than the one that had been devoted to the storage of wine, in fact, it duplicated the first in size. There could be seen quite a number of boxes and barrels scattered about, but every one had been

looked over by vandal hands in search of valuables.

Amos wondered whether it was the plan of Jean that they hide themselves behind some of these empty crates or barrels. That would be all very well in case the Germans refrained from coming down into the place with a lantern, perhaps to strike a match and apply it to the straw that was so abundantly scattered around.

But Jean had started to make his way along between these obstacles. He evidently had a definite object in view, Amos realized, and somehow the boy's hopes began to rise again rather buoyantly. Jean had said they could trust him to the uttermost, and so Amos took himself to task for allowing a feeling of dismay to lay hold of his heart.

They threaded the zigzag passage between those broken boxes and all manner of stuff that marked the eager search for hidden treasure. Now they had arrived at the farther end of the cellar, and the wall barred further progress. Jean drew up, as indeed necessity compelled him to do,

since that barrier stood before him, and he surely could not possess the power of passing through a thick stone wall.

Amos felt a thrill when he discovered that the old gardener was fumbling along the stones as though searching for some object that was invisible to the ordinary eye. He remembered what Jean said about knowing a *secret,* and how it had been the "good madame" herself who had confided it to his care.

Amos was prepared for almost anything, and while he started and uttered an ejaculation when a portion of the solid wall actually commenced to swing inward, he assured himself that this was only in keeping with the whole adventure. What was the use of being in a venerable structure dating back hundreds of years most likely, and not running across something like this? In those old days they always built secret stairways and hidden rooms in houses that were worth while; and really Amos would have been considerably disappointed if nothing of the sort developed in the present instance.

They saw only a dark passage beyond the narrow aperture. Jack's torch failed to illuminate it for any distance, such was the appalling gloom. Amos, however, was not caring about the future, with such a splendid avenue of escape opening up before them.

Jean came to a pause after having managed to accomplish the task he had set himself. Perhaps he did not mean to seek the shelter of the passage until necessity compelled a retreat. The soldier blood in his veins was still dominant, and he would wish to learn whether the fleeing German bombers, on finding the eager French so close at their heels, did take refuge within the ruined chateau.

"So, eet ees well wif us, young messieurs," he was now saying softly. "Here we may disappear at ze second's warning, if zey think to venture down ze steps; and when ze wall eet swings back to ze place, sacre! nevaire will any one be able to find ze secret zat moves eet. If ze light eet be extinguish, we sall be safer."

Jack took the hint, and immediately darkness

so dense that Amos thought it could almost be felt, surrounded them. Listening as they stood there at the gap in the cellar wall they could hear sounds from above. These came in a queer muffled sort of way, as is always the case when one is underground; but they could manage to make out heavy voices, and the stumbling of feet amidst the wreckage that filled the interior of the battered building.

This settled one thing. Jean had not been mistaken when he told them he believed the panic-stricken Germans, fleeing before the mad onset of the French fighters, had conceived the idea of seeking a temporary refuge within the chateau walls. Any port in a storm seems good enough, and no doubt they had no other choice in the matter.

Here they might hope to hold their enemies at bay for a time, and perhaps help could be obtained, if only their plight were made known to their fellows in the trenches. Louder grew the sounds as more of them arrived on the scene. Amos could easily imagine how they were lining

the gaps in the walls, ready to defend the impromptu fort. At any minute the sound of guns might be heard, telling that the action had begun.

To the very last it seemed that Villefue Chateau was bound to witness thrilling spectacles. From the outbreak of the war, when the Teuton hosts came whirling past on their way to capture Paris, it had been in the midst of a constant turmoil. Again and again had opposing parties fought under its venerable walls; graves dotted the greensward which, in former years, had been the pride of the last of the Villefue line. So it was fated to be until nothing but a crumpled pile of stones and mortar marked the spot where the historical building had once proudly stood.

Yes, there sounded the first shot. Amos started when he heard it, though if asked he could not have told why. Others immediately followed. They were coming fast and furious now, and some from farther away, doubtless proceeding from the attacking French without the walls.

He could easily picture the intense flashes that punctured the darkness with the successive dis-

charges. Much of the firing was being done at random, but bullets have a way of finding billets even when sent at haphazard; and no doubt some of the flying lead would carry out its intended mission.

Chancing to come in contact with the body of Jean he could feel the old soldier quivering from head to toe. Amos guessed he was seized with a longing to be there with his comrades, rushing the fort in the ruins, and taking his toll of the despoilers of his beloved France.

## CHAPTER XV

### BEHIND THE CLOSED DOOR

Meanwhile, the roar of battle increased, coming down to the trio in the cellar of the chateau with deadened force. The French were making a valiant attempt to force their way into the ruins, and meeting with violent opposition on the part of the defenders.

Amos wondered what part those bombs played in the heated action, if it happened that the Germans had retained any after their fruitless rush into the enemy trenches. Hurled amidst the oncoming men of Petain they would bring their charge to a sudden halt, since it was next to impossible to continue fighting in the face of such deadly fumes.

He fancied that the furore already showed signs of slackening, which convinced him that his supposition must be pretty close to the truth. What would happen then after the French had been temporarily thrown back? Would the Ger-

mans attempt to continue their mad flight toward their own lines, or on the other hand might they think it wiser to stay where they were, and call for help?

What interested Amos most was the chances of their coming down into the cellar for some purpose, and finding that they had enemies within as well as without the walls. He kept his eyes strained toward the place of the stone steps, although not by the slightest sign could these be seen in all that gloom.

The firing had all but ceased, only an occasional shot sounding. Jean was grumbling to himself, as though he sensed in this a temporary setback for his comrades, and it galled him exceedingly. Perhaps he fancied that had he been on the line such an advantage might not have fallen to the detested defenders of the fort. When one has earned the right to wear the glittering Cross of the Legion of Honor he is privileged to believe himself above the average. It is that same spirit of supreme confidence in himself that has given many a commander the victory.

What now? Were they to continue standing there awaiting the turn of events, or did Jean mean to take advantage of that passage, and escape while the going was good? Amos would have liked very much to ask this question, but Jean had enjoined upon them the need of caution, and he did not think it prudent to display so much curiosity.

Now silence had fallen on the upper world, since there was no further firing or shouting to be heard. The only sounds that drifted to their ears came in low grumbling, as of men complaining of their wounds. Apparently while the Germans had managed to gain a temporary victory over the French assailants they had also suffered more or less severely.

Ah! Amos caught a sudden flash of light. He could easily understand that it came to them by way of the entrance to the cellar. The Germans then had some sort of lantern, or torch, which was being used to show them the way through the mass of débris marking the interior of the chateau. More than that, the light was approach-

ing the top of the cellar steps as though that particular opening might be the object of the hunt.

Jean began to make a move. He also swept the two boys along with him, though all of them kept their eyes glued upon the spot where that light glowed. In another ten seconds all doubt was removed, for they saw a pair of legs appear in view at the top of the steps. Some one was about to descend, and as the mutter of voices reached them they could figure that others were back of the party carrying the means of illumination.

It would therefore be the height of folly to delay longer their retreat. Pushed back another yard or more the boys instinctively knew that Jean was forcing the movable section of the wall into its accustomed place. Amos held his breath in suspense, wondering what would happen should the unique door fail to work properly, and their presence in the cellar passage be betrayed to the coming Germans.

However, his anxiety was short-lived, for he could no longer see the light, from which fact he

judged the wall had swung shut again. Jean seemed perfectly satisfied with the way things were working. He now had an arm thrown about the shoulders of each of his young companions, and somehow the very touch of his hand seemed to reassure Amos. Personal contact works wonders in the way of confidence, as the German commanders have always known; which would account for their forces always charging in dense formation, touching arms as they came, so that a gap in the ranks could be instantly filled by closing up, and an unbroken line shown to the enemy that ofttimes threw him into a panic.

Jean still seemed loth to depart, so they lingered another minute or so, listening to catch what sounds might come through the division wall. Men were talking in guttural accents as they prowled among the broken boxes and other stuff congesting the stone floor of the cellar. Not being able to glimpse what they were doing the boys and Jean could only give a guess. But even the old gardener had begun to lose much of his interest in the others, now that there seemed to

be small chance that they would come to grips. He started away, carrying Jack and Amos along with him.

It was darker than ever, now that the light did not shine. They fairly felt their way along, foot by foot. But then Jean had been through this ancient passage before, and was fairly acquainted with its intricacies, Amos told himself, when he felt a shiver pass through his system at the possibility of being plunged into some sort of gulf that might be yawning unseen at their very feet.

This did not last for long. Then Jean bade Jack make use of his handy torch again. "Eet will be safe to haf eet going, young m'sieur," he was whispering, "and may save us from ze bad fall zat might bruise ze nose and ze shins."

Jack was only too willing to carry out this suggestion. Amos, too, rejoiced, for he did not very much fancy groping along through Stygian gloom, without the slightest knowledge on his part as to where they were going, or what obstacles might lie in their path.

He looked to the right and to the left as soon as the light came, but there was very little to see, only a tunnel just high enough to admit of a man walking if he bent his head a little, and so confined with regard to width that really Amos believed he could touch either side by extending both arms at length.

It was cut through solid stone, part of the way at least, and a retaining wall had been built in other places. Amos felt a curiosity to know who had originally made this queer passageway leading from the cellar of the chateau to some destination beyond. Its construction went back to the time when the massive walls of the building had been first erected, perhaps several hundred years ago. In those romantic days there were knights and squires, and kings, who played the part of robber barons; so that a wise man always saw to it that his habitation was provided with a secret means for escape in case of his garrison being taken by surprise and overpowered.

Then again it might be, Amos reasoned, that some of the earlier Villefues were not averse to

adding to their hoarded store of wealth by entering into some profitable smuggling game, for the border was not so very far distant; and in that event a convenient passage would be of great value.

Yes, if those stones only had the gift of speech he felt that they could tell a most interesting tale, and one that would thrill to the marrow. He meant to ask Jean more about these things, always provided that they themselves passed through this adventure with their lives.

About this time Amos noticed that the old soldier was beginning to show fresh signs of nervousness. Evidently they were approaching a crisis of some sort. He looked ahead and believed he could glimpse what appeared to be the end of the friendly passage. Yes, there was some sort of heavy door there. Amos wondered what lay beyond. Then all at once it flashed upon him that they had hoped to discover some one amidst the ruins—Madame Villefue, and little Pauline! To be sure, it was possible that the lady of the chateau would have taken refuge in this secret

underground retreat, where she might have carried provisions in anticipation of being thus immured while the mighty shells were bursting about the devoted building, and scattering desolation on every hand.

It would be splendid if only they might come to the end of their search so easily. Amos kept his gaze riveted on that door they were approaching. He was so much absorbed with watching it that he failed to notice some obstacle in his path until he had clumsily stumbled over it, so that he lost his balance, and fell on hands and knees.

He suffered no damage save a slight bruise on his knee, but the sudden manner of his fall forced an exclamation from his lips. Jack stretched out a hand and helped his chum up again. Jean looked toward the heavy door as though wondering if that exclamation could have reached any ears beyond. Then he stepped forward and without hesitation managed to draw the door open.

There was light beyond, and as Amos eagerly looked he saw something that gave him the thrill of his life.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE TRAIL LENGTHENS

There seemed to be quite a roomy space beyond the door. It contained rugs and some light furniture, evidently fetched down from time to time from the chateau before the vandals had entirely destroyed the contents of the unfortunate building. Upon a table several candles were burning. There was also some means for doing simple cooking, showing that this refuge had been used as a living place.

But all this Amos was to notice more at length later on. Just then his full attention was taken up with staring at the one apparent occupant of this underground retreat. He knew he must be looking at Madame Villefue as soon as he set eyes on her. All that he had heard told about the heroic lady flashed into his mind. Determined not to forsake her heritage as long as one stone remained on another she had even bur-

Amos saw her standing there looking like a tragedy queen.
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rowed here like a rabbit, living away from the sun and the blue sky, and perhaps only coming to the surface at night, to wander about her devastated grounds where the graves of friends and foes abounded, and hardly a living thing was left to remind her of happier days.

Amos saw her standing there looking like a tragedy queen. She must have been startled when he uttered that involuntary cry, and it was then she struggled to her feet, though apparently no longer strong, save in her indomitable will-power.

He saw that she had a weapon in her hand, hastily snatched from the table before her. Amos knew that Madame Villefue was just the one to have used that automatic revolver, had she discovered the detested grass-green uniform of a German decorating the figure of the one who led the way through that door of the passage.

Jean gave a low moan. It pained him to see his beloved mistress looking so deathly white, so weak, he who would only too willingly have given his very life in loyal service for her.

But Amos was pleased to see that the half-raised hand dropped to her side. She had recognized the uniform. These who intruded on her solitude were not marauding Huns, then, but of the French army, friends. It made a vast difference on which side they fought, and with what intentions they came breaking in upon her privacy, when she believed her retreat to be her own secret.

But Jean could not keep silent longer. His whole heart was in his trembling voice as he pressed forward. He was speaking in French, and Amos, of course, could not understand all he said, but it was easy to guess the rest.

The lady started and looked as though she could hardly believe her ears. She had seen Jean last when he bravely went away in his uniform to take his place among the ranks of his country's defenders. Perhaps she had long since rested in the belief that like uncounted other heroic souls the old man had also given up his life for his distressed country, staggering under the yoke of German oppression.

To have him appear thus suddenly and dramatically before her brought a touch of color to her pallid cheeks, while her glorious eyes flashed with new fire. Now Jean was on one knee before her, actually kissing the hem of her garment which he had picked up with his trembling hands. Amos understood what real devotion meant when he looked upon this remarkable scene.

There were tears in those wonderful eyes now, tears that the barbarities of the ruthless invaders who had destroyed all that was beautiful about her ancestral home could never start. She touched her hand to the bared white-crowned head of the old man, as if invoking Heaven's choicest blessing on him for his loyalty to France. Then she possibly bade him stand up, for Jean managed to get upon his feet again.

They had commenced a voluble conversation, Jean possibly starting to explain who his two younger companions were, and what their mission was, when suddenly she caught sight of the glittering emblem of valor pinned on the left breast of his blue coat. It drew wondering ex-

clamations from her, and she asked questions that the old man replied to with a pardonable touch of pride. Nor was Amos much surprised when the lady of the chateau actually saluted her former head-gardener with a kiss upon either cheek, the customary French way of kissing. It was only what the hero deserved, Amos told himself. It was all in the name of France.

Jack meanwhile had been glancing around the place. He wondered why they did not glimpse some one else there, Pauline, the little girl to find whom they had come through the submarine-infested deeps, and dared all perils—Pauline, whose mother was crying her pretty eyes out away over there in America.

Her absence was beginning to cause him anxiety. It was fine to know that they had succeeded in discovering Madame Villefue, but if anything had happened to the child, of what avail would all their sacrifices be, he asked himself?

He wished the lady would ask to be introduced to himself and Amos, so that he could find out the truth. Still, it seemed as though a cold hand

were resting on his heart, and he dreaded lest they were about to hear bad news.

How dreadful it would be if she had to tell them that somewhere in a retired nook of the grounds there was a small grave in which Pauline lay, a victim to one of those cruel shells; or it might be fatally injured in one of the furious fights that must have occurred with unremitting frequency, covering every rod in that vicinity.

Jean beckoned to them, and Amos was quick to discover that they were wanted. He could not take his eyes off the remarkable countenance of the lady, for he had never seen one like it in all his life, so noble, so brave, so filled with undying devotion to high principles and patriotism.

"My faithful Jean tells me you have come all the way from America, from my own daughter Adele, to find me," she commenced to say, speaking in perfect English, to the immense relief of Amos. "You must surely be brave boys to undertake so long a journey, and to face so many perils."

She saluted them both as she had done Jean,

and Amos' cheeks burned, not with embarrassment, but actual pride, for he considered that he had had a great honor bestowed upon him.

"Oh! we do not think that we have been in so very much danger," he hastened to say, with becoming modesty. "We did meet with several delays, though, and it was only through our own General Pershing, in command of the American forces now in France, that we got here in the end."

Perhaps Amos had a reason for bringing in the magnetic name of Pershing when he said this. If so, he found a quick response, for the lady's face lighted up with enthusiasm, and she raised her eyes as though in gratitude to Heaven for having some long uttered prayer answered.

"Can it be possible that America has acted so soon, and has troops on the firing line?" she was saying rapturously. "Oh! I am rejoiced that I live to see this day for which my fainting heart has so long yearned. It is the beginning of the end of the German beast. Already he is straining every nerve to hold out against the sons of

France and the brave British, and the Italian hosts; how then can he stand before the coming of millions of fighting men from the republic across the sea that has never lost a war in all its history?"

Tears were streaming down her cheeks, as she said this, such was her emotion.

"Well," Amos managed to explain, "they're hardly in the trenches yet, but training in a big camp close by, so as to take their places there. Ten million young men have answered the first draft to give us the National Army that will bring the Kaiser to his knees. They'll be over here after a bit, millions strong. You can hear Uncle Sam getting ready all over the whole land. Jack, I say, haven't you forgotten to ask about Pauline?"

Jack looked to see what the effect of this question might be on the lady of the chateau. She had turned pale again, and there was an expression on her face that alarmed Jack.

"Pauline," he heard her say softly, "yes, you have come to learn what has happened to Adele's

dear child. Alas! it breaks my poor heart to say I fear that I have only evil news for you!"

"Oh! is it so bad as that then?" gasped Amos, trembling like an aspen leaf. "Do you mean Pauline is—dead, ma'am?"

"I do not know, I only fear the worst," she hastened to say. "She has not been here with me for some time. I could not allow her to remain longer, the danger was so great. As for myself I had sworn that nothing should cause me to leave this sacred spot where my ancestors lived and died. I would remain and guard their graves from desecration at the hands of the Boches until the end came for me also. Even when tempted to go with Pauline I fought down the weakness. Here I have stayed alone, seeing, hearing everything, yet myself unnoticed. But the end must be near, for the last tower is trembling, and may fall at any time. I have only one hope remaining, which is that when with my own hand I annihilate all that is left of Villefue Chateau it may carry into the air with its fragments as

many of the ruthless Huns as can crowd within the walls!"

How her words thrilled Amos, who could understand what she meant to do. In some remarkable manner then she had managed to place a mine under the ruins, which could be fired through some hidden wire connected with a battery; and hers was to be the hand to press the button when she believed the fatal moment had come. Perhaps she even expected to be buried herself under the mass of falling walls. Well, what more fitting than that the last of the proud Villefues should sleep there forever, with the ruins of her chateau for a tombstone?

"But Pauline, what of her?" asked Jack, not allowing himself to be swayed by sentiment as Amos was in danger of doing.

"Listen, and I will tell you everything," she went on. "I repented long ago with regard to keeping my darling grandchild with me through these troublous times; but for a year and more we seemed to be able to get along fairly well. Then, after the valor of my compatriots had

forced the Germans to move back again, and again, they grew more vicious, as though with defeat staring them in the face they meant to visit their bad temper on the wretched inhabitants of the country they knew they could not long hold.

"There came several occasions where I received a shock. I began to fear for the safety of the girl, for she is very beautiful, and attracted much attention from every German soldier and officer who came here. I dreaded lest some one of them might steal her, hoping to bring the child up as his own in the country all French women detest. But what to do with Pauline worried me, for it was utterly impossible that I leave my post here, to take her to Paris, where a friend could watch over her until Adele sent across for her own.

"Then the chance came to start her on her way, and I was tempted to avail myself of it, though I assure you, my friends, it almost broke my poor heart to give her up. I sternly set myself to think only of what was for Pauline's good, and

willingly accepted all the suffering. Oh! how many times has my heart cried out for her; and if it had to be done over again I fear that I would not have the strength to permit her to go from me.

"Now you shall hear how it came about. Then perhaps you may understand why ever since I let her go grave doubts and fears have troubled me, until I almost prayed for the end to come and finish all.

"By merest accident there came here one day, after the poor wounded French aviator left us, a man whom I had long known. He was a good man, who had formerly occupied the place of burgomaster in our little village that is now, alas, no more, since the Boches have leveled every humble home in this once beautiful valley.

"This good man had been away in Paris, but finding himself once more in the vicinity of his former home, and learning that it was said the wretched lady of Villefue Chateau still haunted her ruined towers, he had taken advantage of a lull in the fighting to steal out and endeavor to

visit me, for we had long been the warmest of friends.

"Glad, indeed, was I to see M'sieur Francois Dempsey, for it was seldom that I ever had an opportunity to condole with an old friend. His coming gave me an inspiration. Pauline, why should she not accept this chance to go to Paris and safety in the charge of this faithful one? Once it entered my head I could not hesitate. The welfare, perhaps the very life of my darling would depend on my making this sacrifice.

"So I talked it over with M'sieur Dempsey, who agreed with me that it was only right the girl should leave this danger zone. What happened to me was a matter of very small consequence, but it did matter very much whether that sweet child were saved or lost, since her whole future lay before her.

"Very well. I let her go with my old friend. He promised on his honor to send me word as soon as he reached Paris. He would also communicate with Adele, so she could send over and get her daughter; since, of course, it would be

impossible for her to come in person, the sea being a deadly menace to her, the doctors all say.

"Ah! it was hard to see Pauline go. She cried as if her little heart would break, and surely mine must be of steel to be able to resist her entreaties that I would not send her away. But I knew her wound would soon heal, and what did it matter if an old woman grieved herself sick on being left alone?

"So they went from my sight. That was five months ago yesterday, young messieurs, away back in the time of the hard frost. I counted the days, telling myself when they must have arrived in Paris, and how word was even then on the way, in a manner we had arranged between us, so that before long I must know that all was well. Five long months, I say, that have seemed like so many years, and never once have I heard from them! If the earth had opened and swallowed M'sieur Dempsey and my little Pauline they could not have disappeared more completely. That is my story, brave boys; and oh! if I could

only believe that you who have been so favored by fortune in the past, might seek and find that dear one, what inexpressible joy it would bring to my stricken heart!"

## CHAPTER XVII

### A CALL FOR HELP

Amos looked in sore dismay at Jack. It was certainly hard, the way a cruel fortune seemed to take savage delight in baffling them. After fighting their way up to this point, and even finding Pauline's patriotic grandmother in the ruins of Villefue Chateau, to learn that the girl had been gone for nearly half a year, was discouraging.

But neither of the boys thought of giving up. They were not built that way. Those who succeed in accomplishing great things are able to meet disappointments, and after each blow again rise gallantly to the occasion.

"Well, we've got our work cut out for us, seems like, Jack," said Amos, a grim look settling upon his young face.

"And believe me," added the other, with the same sort of energy, "we'll find her if she's still alive, or know the reason why."

"May Heaven give you the courage and good fortune to succeed!" cried the still proud and unconquered owner of the lost chateau. "Your coming has been the only ray of sunshine that has broken in upon my life for all these dreadful months. It is as though I could detect a new and invigorating atmosphere wafted across this valley of death and mouldering destruction, coming from your healthy land across the sea. Ask me any questions you see fit, for there is nothing I would not do to aid you in your noble mission."

Jack grasped the opportunity and immediately started in to find out what he could with regard to the intended route that the old burgomaster expected to take at the time he left the ruins.

One of the first and most alarming things he learned was that there had been a strong German action just then. This was what had given Madame Villefue cause for considerable concern ever since.

"I have had a feeling that something dreadful may have befallen the pair before they could cross to the other side of the ground where the fighting was fiercest," she told them. "Any one of a thousand things might have happened to prevent their ever reaching Paris. With the whole country in such a state of turmoil, I fear very much that you may find it impossible to follow them."

"If we do fail," Jack assured her, in his resolute way, "it will certainly not be from lack of trying."

"And," added Amos, also wishing to buoy up her sinking spirits, "we have done considerable of tracking in our lives. The only thing that might upset all our calculations would be for the Germans to get hold of them. We couldn't think of entering their lines, and asking them to let us take Pauline back home. Americans have been in pretty bad odor for a long time in Berlin; and now that Pershing and his army have landed in France to take a whack at the Huns they'd just

make prisoners of us. That wouldn't help Pauline any."

Jack realized even better than the amiable Amos what a mountainous task was now set before them. He reckoned that the chances were about a dozen to one they would never be able to discover what had become of the old burgomaster and his pretty little charge.

Not wishing to lose any more time than could be helped, he asked other questions along lines that he thought might be vital. Then he took up the matter of their being able to leave the underground retreat.

"That is a very simple thing, I am glad to inform you, M'sieur Jack," the lady of the chateau told him, smiling faintly, almost tragically, he thought. "Others may not find it so easy to depart. There is a passage leading from this place to a little ravine that just now is overgrown with a wilderness of brush, since for three years I have had no one to keep things down. Good, faithful Jean here knows all about it. Trust to his guidance, and all will be well. Now, let me

embrace you both again as though you were my own sons. Should the good Dieu permit it that in time you should find my little lamb, assure her that my last thoughts were of her alone."

Something in the way she said this caused Jack to imagine certain things which he could not voice. It was evident, however, that Madame Villefue did not expect to ever look upon the cherished face of little Pauline again in this world, and that she believed her end was near.

Presently they were on the move again. Jean—faithful, reliant old Jean—led them, although Jack kept close at his heels, making good use of that little torch, for the way was very dark and gloomy.

No one said anything as they made their way along the narrow passage fashioned long, long ago when the chateau housed the ancestors of the poor lady who had lived to see the end of it all.

Once Amos looked back over his shoulder, which was an old habit with the boy on leaving a camp or other place. He saw Madame Villefue was on her knees, praying for the success of

their new undertaking. Well, with such a blank outlook stretching before them he guessed that they would have need of all the good lady's prayers.

Even after a bend in the tortuous passage, which followed some vein of earth running through the solid rock, had shut out all view of the subterranean apartment where she had made her home, Amos could not get that vivid picture out of his mind. A little later on, perhaps, and he might better understand the real significance of her actions as she knelt there. If Jack could have seen it he would have said she was consecrating herself afresh to the vow of vengeance which she had taken every day against the cruel enemies.

"We must be getting pretty close to the end of this passage, eh, Jean?" whispered Amos, after a bit, unable to keep silent any longer.

"Eet ees just so, I am happy to inform you," came the cautious reply. "Even now if you look beyond, young m'sieur, eet may be you will notice how ze wall eet comes to one stop. There we

sall find ze rock which we must push aside. Zen it will be to creep out, and see ze stars above us, and ze scrub trees among ze bushes of ze ravine."

It turned out as the guide had said, and in another minute Amos was lending his aid to push aside a stone that seemed to have been frequently worked of late, from the ease with which it could be moved. From this Jack judged that the old lady was accustomed to make use of this exit whenever she needed fresh water, for he could hear a small stream gurgling through the ravine bottom.

As soon as they were free from the underground passage, and the rock barrier had been once more replaced so that hostile eyes might not discover its secret, both boys drew in deep breaths of relief.

While not disposed to "look a gift horse in the mouth," they felt glad to be once more in the open. That subterranean retreat had been a good friend to them, and they would never forget it, but Amos confessed to himself that the confined air down below was pretty "musty," and that he

did not enjoy it very much. He wondered how the old lady could have stood it all those long months, but concluded that with her heart burning with anger toward the invaders, she hardly noticed such a small thing as tainted atmosphere.

All seemed to be quiet in the direction of the chateau grounds, which Amos imagined lay off to the northeast. He could not be quite certain, for he appeared to be somewhat twisted in his grasp with regard to locations; and until he could pick out the north star he might not be absolutely sure of the points of the compass.

Jean, too, stood and looked back, so that presently Amos judged he had made a wise guess on seeing the direction of the old gardener's gaze. Jean was shaking his head in a doleful fashion. Apparently that recent interview with his one-time mistress weighed heavily on his mind. It must have brought up all the happy days of yore when the desolate valley was one of the most beautiful sections in all Northern France. More than that, something else undoubtedly disturbed old Jean. Jack wondered if the lady had con-

fided her plans to him, with a last message which he was to transmit to some one far distant, who was in her thoughts.

"Now we must go, young messieurs, though eet almost breaks my heart to leave her there, my poor mistress. But she was ever possessed of zat high-spirited nature, and eet ees vat she says is a fitting end for ze last of ze noble Villefues."

He seemed to have great difficulty in tearing his eyes away from the spot where he knew she remained deep down under the devastated gardens that had once been the pride of his soul. As they made their way along, listening constantly for any sign that might spell trouble, Jean often turned his head for a fleeting backward look, and Amos, too, got the habit.

Once, twice, there came a sporadic shot, as though one of the German defenders of the ruined chateau believed he had discovered a skulking figure creeping toward the walls. But the French were strangely quiet, though Jack, knowing their determined nature, could not for one moment believe they had given up the attack.

In all likelihood they were arranging their plans for another desperate assault on the stronghold of the enemy, bent on exterminating the last of that bombing party. At any minute he fancied the fighting would break out afresh, with a hand-to-hand combat amidst the scattered stones that had once formed the walls of the stricken tower, mate to the one that still survived, though it also was ready to topple over with the coming of another shell.

The trio had moved along in this fashion for some ten minutes, and managed to place quite a little distance between themselves and the scene of their late adventure. Then it was Jean who gave vent to a sudden exclamation:

"Look zere, and you will see zat ze Boches haf send ze word for help!"

As they turned their heads on coming to a standstill the boys discovered that a peculiar red glow was beginning to appear. Brighter it grew until they could plainly make out the leaning tower of the old chateau. Some bold spirit among the interned Teutons had managed to climb to the

top of the tower at the risk of his life, and set off a packet of red fire. There could be no question about this being a signal meant for their comrades in the main trenches. It called for a rescue party to come to their relief, and announced that unless such was sent out, in all probability the beleaguered ones would be captured or slain. The sight of the old tower, seen through the glasses that would be instantly leveled upon the spot, was sufficient to tell the German commander at that front where the trouble lay.

"Let us hope the relief column will arrive too late," said Jack solemnly.

"And that the brave French will pocket the last of the bombers in a hurry," added Amos, just as fervently, for he found himself hating the despoilers almost as though it had been a section in his own beautiful country that was laid waste.

They were still standing there, watching the last faint glow of the signal light dying away, when without any warning the very ground under their feet trembled as with an earthquake. At the same time there came a rumbling sound

worse even than the discharge of those powerful French seventy-five guns. Where the red fire had just been bathing the rocking tower in its hectic glow they saw shooting up into the air a mass of flames, as though some gigantic munition works had exploded.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ON THE ALTAR OF PATRIOTISM

"Oh, Jack, listen!"

A strange, dull pattering noise reached them. It was as though a multitude of weighty missiles were being hurled in a shower at some object. Jack guessed what it meant. Those strange sounds were produced by heavy stones falling from a great height to the earth. They were coming down as the hail falls in a blasting summer storm.

Intense darkness had followed that vivid flash, and for a number of seconds the weird bombardment continued. Then silence, deep and profound, ensued. The tragedy was complete!

"Oh! what does it all mean?" gasped the poor bewildered Amos.

Apparently he had no idea as had come into the more active mind of Jack, at the time they were saying farewell to the lady of the chateau,

of the meaning of that set look of a martyr stamped on her pallid face, and the holy glow of determination in her eyes.

"She has blown up the ruins, and with them the whole German garrison!" said Jack, taking off his hat as one might when a funeral is going by. It was of the brave French lady he was thinking, and not of those men.

"Do you mean Madame Villefue?" asked Amos, beginning to see a great light. "Did she really have it fixed so that she could destroy the ruins of her dear old home; and oh! Jack, do you think she perished with the rest?"

A deep and hollow groan from old Jean, who was on his knees crossing himself again and again, told that he at least feared the worst. Still perhaps she would have wished it to be so, for what had she to live for any longer?

Amos had seen many amazing things for a boy of his years, but this excelled them all. It was the most tragic occurrence that could be imagined. He shivered to remember how only a brief time had elapsed since they had allowed that

wonderful old lady to solemnly press a kiss on either cheek, and wish them godspeed in their undertaking. Now, she had passed on to the next world, her last act one of retaliation in the name of her stricken country.

Jean continued to kneel there and mumble to himself, nor did either of the two boys have the heart to disturb the old retainer of the Villefues. They could now begin to hear voices raised almost to shouts. These came from the quarter where they had just seen such a thrilling spectacle. Jack could easily surmise that it must be the French soldiers, who were moving forward to find out what had really happened, and if any of the German garrison survived the upheaval.

What a remarkable experience it had all been for them, he was thinking, as he stood waiting for their guide to recover from his shock, and continue to lead them on toward the French lines. That night certainly would never be forgotten as long as memory served them; nor could Jack ever cease to see the exalted face of that high-spirited old French lady before him. Every time she came

into his mind he must instinctively take off his hat in recognition of her unflinching courage. No wonder, he told himself, that the seemingly invincible German host was turned back at the Marne; a nation capable of producing such women as Madame Villefue must have sons who could never be decisively defeated. Napoleon and his deathless legions were in the boy's mind as he thought of the exposition of French devotion just witnessed.

Jean had arisen again. He had recovered from the blow which that terrible catastrophe had dealt him.

"Come, we will go now, young messieurs," he told them, steadily enough. "Zere ees no need of our stay here any more. She haf finish ze good work. Eet ees true zat ze noble chateau eet haf been demolish, but efery stone mark ze last resting place of a Boche. Ah! nevaire did such a magnificent lady live as my own dear mistress! I am desolate, but zere ees still much to be done while ze enemy stands on ze sacred soil of France."

That was his one inspiration, to continue to lessen the number of those whose feet were desecrating holy ground. Jack would always be glad he had met and known Jean Duval. To have such a sturdy, simple, yet steadfast soul, call him friend was an honor not to be despised.

They accordingly set out. The cries could still be heard from the rear as though the French had busied themselves in searching among the scattered relics of the old chateau, now, alas, no more, for the mangled figures of their foes upon whom such an astonishing blow had fallen. Lights, too, were to be seen, possibly coming from portions of timbers that had been set afire by the explosion, and which illumination would aid the soldiers in their search.

Nothing happened to interfere with their further progress across the disputed ground between the two hostile armies, and in due time they were challenged by the French sentries. Jean saw them safely through, and left them alongside the shack at which they had been billeted. Here some of the younger officers were

sitting around a table indulging in a game of cards, for the hour was not so very late. They greeted the two American boys cordially, and one who spoke English perfectly called out in a jocular vein:

"We are all puzzling our brains to account for that stunning explosion which shook this ground under us. Some say it was an ammunition park blown up by a bomb from an airplane. Others believe that a mine was exploded under the German trenches, though we have not heard the roar of battle following it. Perhaps now, young messieurs, you may be in a position to enlighten us?"

When he said this he did not dream that they would be able to lift the veil of mystery connected with that terrific explosion. Jack knew of no reason why he should not speak and tell what had happened. It would be known in the morning, at any rate; and these were all good fellows who had been very kind to the "strangers within the gates."

So, sitting down, as Amos had already done, being quite tired after a long day, and such a

tempestuous night, he told what had brought them to France, and gradually came to the tragic events of the night.

The officers hung on every word, the one who talked good English translating, as Jack paused after each sentence. They could hardly believe what they listened to, it seemed so amazing that two lads like these Americans should have passed through so many wonderful adventures; for Jack had to tell something of their previous trip to war-stricken Europe and what they had seen in Belgium, France, and at the Dardanelles front.

When he finally came to their meeting with the lady of the chateau, and then described how they had every reason to believe she had sacrificed her own life in the cause of destroying Germans, those impulsive and warm-hearted young Frenchmen bent their heads as though in reverence.

It was a long time before they would let the boys seek their cots, they had so many eager questions to ask.

"When will we see the general who was so kind to us, and tell him all that happened?" Amos

was asking between yawns, as they prepared to get under the blankets that had been allotted to each army cot.

"It will have to wait until morning," Jack replied, as though he had already arranged all this in his mind. "He will be interested, and perhaps able to help us make a decent start in our search; though I'm afraid the trail has long ago grown cold, and we're bound to have a hard time of it. But try to forget all your troubles for to-night, Amos, and get some sleep."

Neither of them succeeded very well. Those tragic happenings of the last few hours still haunted their minds. Again, in imagination, they saw the lady of the chateau as she said good-bye and blessed them as brave boys well worthy of the name of Americans. Her fate would always grieve them both, and Jack was resolved to ask the commanding officer to have a careful search of the ruins made, particularly in the quarter where that secret passage ran. If she were indeed dead then it was only fitting that she should receive a proper burial; but there was

also a chance that she might still be alive, though suffering. He was sure his request would meet with a prompt and favorable reception.

Then the dawn of another day came, and the boys, after they had broken their fast, sought an interview with the general. It chanced that there was nothing of exceeding great importance on for that day, so he was pleased to have them in for a talk.

Great was his astonishment to learn the meaning of that amazing explosion at Villefue Chateau, which was still puzzling those who had been on the spot. He asked many questions and seemed visibly affected upon hearing of the last sacrifice on the altar of her country which the old lady of the mansion had made.

"It will give me much pleasure to do what you ask," he told Jack, after the other had mentioned the possibility of Madame Villefue being still alive, though perhaps injured, in her subterranean retreat. "I will send out a party with the necessary tools, and they shall not cease working until they have learned the truth. If her poor

body is discovered we will give it a military funeral; and should life still remain, depend upon it every means will be exhausted to coax the flickering spark back again. Poor suffering France can ill afford to lose such a noble soul!"

Amos, too, was very glad to hear the general make this promise, for he could not bear the thought of quitting that section of the country with the mystery connected with her life or death still unsolved.

They left the general, after receiving some information, as well as a signed paper from him, the last of which was apt to prove very useful to them in their wanderings in search of the missing burgomaster and Pauline.

It must indeed be a sanguine nature that could hope for any sort of success in such a blind venture. Amos, as usual, was depending partly on the good luck that nearly always haunted their footsteps, but with Jack it was different. He realized that while fortune might smile on them, for the most part their success, if it came at all, would be due to perseverance and sagacity.

Clues would have to be run down, and false information might take them upon trails at a waste of time and money.

The worst of it all, in Jack's mind, was the long passage of time since M'sieur Francois Dempsey had taken the little girl away from her grandmother's charge, and started on the road to Paris. Amos voiced this when he went on to say, as they walked from the general's headquarters toward their own lodgings:

"But think of it, Jack, five months have passed away. If the scent lay warm and fresh we might have a chance to follow; but five months is a terrible stretch. Why, people will have forgotten that they ever saw an old man leading a pretty little girl along the road. The chances are, you know, they couldn't get a ride in a train or car headed for Paris, because everything has been filled with wounded poilus heading for the hospitals. Five months really stands for a hundred and fifty days, you know. Whew!"

"I hope you're not getting cold feet, Amos, before we've even started out," suggested Jack re-

proachfully; at which the other braced himself, closed his jaws firmly together, and hastened to say:

"Perhaps I *was* a little bit inclined that way, Jack, but it's all over now. You've made me remember how often in the past things have looked black as midnight, and yet every time we've managed some way or other to push through. I've got my second wind, I guess you could call it; and from now on you won't hear me grumbling one whit. The sooner we get a move on, the better I'll be satisfied."

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

They got the "move on." It meant that they must leave the pleasant quarters in which they had been established through the courtesy of the French general who had proven such a good friend in time of need. After that, each day must look after itself. They would never know what was before them, nor where they might lay their heads when night came.

All the while they expected to ask questions of every one they met. Surely, they must run across some garrulous old French woman or man whose memory might go back five months, and who could give them a grain of information concerning the elderly gentleman and the pretty girl passing that way, with Paris their final objective.

Amos was feeling more hopeful now. That "second wind" of his was holding out fairly well, it seemed. The rainbow of promise was painted

in vivid colors along the heavens. Amos had always been a fellow of "freaks," at one time cast deep down in dejection through some little happening, and anon raised to the pinnacle of hope.

Two hours passed by.

A change was beginning to come over the dreams of Amos, caused principally by the fact that they were handicapped fearfully by their "limping French," as he persisted in calling their way of speaking the language.

They found opportunities for seeking information. Here and there some of the poor peasants still clung to their ruined homes, having really no other place on earth to go to. Fresh graves had to be attended to, graves that held their dear ones, sacrificed because of the cruel reprisals on the part of the invaders, which they were pleased to term "military exigencies, requiring a stern lesson, so as to intimidate the defiant spirit of the inhabitants, and make them docile."

When the boys started to make their eager inquiries of these stolid peasants they immediately ran across a stumbling-block. The others

would stare at them, and listen, then say something that was almost like Greek to both Jack and Amos. It became evident that neither side could understand the other, and yet both were supposed to be speaking French. Then Jack would try again, aided by Amos' suggestions, and after laborious effort they would watch the old man or woman to see if the first flickering look of intelligence would pass over it, but in vain.

So it would go for some time. Sometimes it appeared that the peasant thought they were asking after two pigs that had wandered off. Another time they were mistaken as government agents, delivering a warning concerning companies of marauding Boches said to be in the vicinity.

Amos at length began to despair.

"Oh!" he groaned after their third attempt proved so profitless, "why didn't we foresee this horrible draw, and get some real French scholar to write us out a list of questions in the language, with their English equivalents; and then we could point to each, and get the answer."

"All very good," remarked Jack. "I can see two big objections to the scheme you mention."

"How?" demanded the other, bristling.

"In the first place," he was told, "it isn't likely that many of these old people can read. Supposing we found one who could, and who tried to oblige us with the answers, it wouldn't help much, for neither of us seems able to grasp anything they say."

"Oh! thunder! whatever will we do about it, Jack?" grumbled Amos, his face taking on a look of dismay. "Why, right now we may be close on to some mighty important information, and not know a thing about it. This is the limit. I'm beginning to feel sick about it."

"Cheer up," said Jack, laughing as he spoke. "You know how often luck has smiled on us when we were down to the last copper. Well, history is going to repeat itself. Look who's coming!"

Thrilled by those words, Amos turned his head to follow the line of Jack's extended forefinger. He saw a moving figure hurrying toward them,

and apparently coming along the same course they had recently passed over.

The figure looked strangely familiar to him, for he could remember even the odd limp, showing that some old wound still bothered a little.

"What's this I see?" Amos gasped, lost in mingled astonishment and delight, while his face lighted up as with sunshine. "Jack, that's sure our good old friend Sergeant Jean, winner of the wonderful Cross of the Legion of Honor, which I can see right now glittering there on his broad chest. Oh! where did he spring from, just like the manna came down from heaven to the children of Israel in the desert?"

"We'll soon find that out, when he arrives," Jack told him composedly. "See, he waves his hand to us in his genial way, as much as to say it's going to be all right now."

"I'm sure this will be the case," added the now jubilant Amos, almost dancing around. "Old Jean will know what those poor peasants are trying to tell us. I guess our Gettysburg has been passed, Jack, and from this time on we'll begin

to climb upwards. Now, I wonder if we are to thank that mighty obliging general for this fresh favor?"

"Just as like as not, Amos. I'm only surprised at myself for not thinking to ask for a guide while we were chatting with him this morning. After we went he must have realized what we would be up against, and then he sent Jean after us."

That proved to be exactly what had happened. The vigorous old soldier was not long in joining them, and his first act was to make a stiff military salute. In answer to questions he entered into explanations covering the matter of his appearing so unexpectedly on the scene.

"Ze good general he send for me, and he say zat he fear you haf a hard time asking ze question you tell heem about. So he gif me ze order to follow and join you. See, I haf it here in ze writing of my general, wif hees own name sign below. Eet will be somezings to keep and show when ze war ees over and mebbe once more Jean he go back to ze gardening."

Remembering in what a sad ruin the whole Villefue estate lay Jack wondered how the old man could ever indulge in any hope that he might live to see it built up again. Evidently Jean would not allow himself to believe otherwise. Perhaps in his stout heart he forced himself to feel positive that the good lady of the chateau had also escaped harm when she blew up the wreckage, and would live long after the terrible war had become a memory. If Jean could build up such air-castles, Jack thought he must be the greatest optimist going.

Both boys were made happy by his coming. He turned to the aged peasant and commenced a brisk conversation with him, translating as he went on, for the benefit of the others.

It appeared that the relic who guarded the remains of his once comfortable cottage and prolific garden, both laid waste by the hand of the vandal horde, had no news to give them. If a man leading a girl, strangers to that section of the country, had passed by, it must have been during the night-time, he stated.

Accordingly they wasted no more time there, but went on their way. Jean was now able to exercise his judgment in the matter, and change their course a bit. He knew which was most likely to be the route taken by M. Dempsey, when trying to work his way along, so as to finally strike the road to Paris.

About the middle of the afternoon they were also able to get a bite of food from some people, who it seemed had hardly enough to satisfy their own hunger. It was the plainest of "war bread," and the coarse taste made Amos wince, remembering past glorious meals at home, when his favorite cornbread, done to a brown turn, tempted his appetite; or the enormous pile of lovely batter-cakes, with maple syrup or honey, kept him at the table until he could hardly breathe.

Still, he ate it, and even wished there had been more, because a boy's appetite is ferocious, and considers quantity rather than quality. It was at this cottage, part of which had been patched up again after the fire that threatened to destroy

it completely had been extinguished, that they came upon the very first clue.

A small boy had listened to what Jean was asking. Jack discovered his features working, and his eyes sparkling, and his intuition told him that little chap knew something worth while.

"Ask the old man to question the kid, Jean?" he remarked to the guide aside. "I can see from his face that he's almost bursting with some news, which he's too timid to volunteer."

"Little we care what the source, if only we can pick up news," remarked Amos.

So the small chap was interrogated by his grandfather. Jack had made a good guess. The lad had been out unusually early one morning long, long ago, and a stranger leading a very pretty girl had asked him some questions concerning the next village. In return, the man had given him a shining franc, which Henri had hidden securely away so that the Boches might not rob him, even saying nothing of his prize to his folks. The couple had gone on, he explained, and

the last he saw of them they were well on their way toward the next village.

This sounded promising, for both boys felt pretty positive the two foot-travelers were M. Dempsey and Pauline, bound for the road to Paris. But the old man was shaking his head, as though distressed.

"He say," explained Jean, after further talk, "zat he ees much afraid zey haf been in troubles, for eet happen zat about ze time zere was much raiding again of zose house-burners, ze Boches, an' most of ze village he learn was destroy. Zese peoples nevaire stray far away from zere poor homes zese days, so zat time no one haf been over to see what did happen. To meet ze Germans on ze road eet mean to be shoot as one spy, for long ago zey order eferybody to stay at ze home all ze times."

"Well, we'll put for that village, then," said Jack, "and hope to learn something worth while. We're expecting and praying for good news, yet any sort would be better than uncertainty."

"That's right," grunted Amos fervently. "It's

like banging your head against a blank wall. Jean was right when he told us he felt sure they must have taken this course; it was the only way they could follow, for the German lines hadn't fallen back so far."

They pushed ahead resolutely, and later on, in the afternoon, toward the close of the summer day, were approaching a wretched hovel, which at one time may have been a cosy cottage with flowering vines covering its walls, though the heavy hand of war had fallen upon it, like all others belonging to the French peasants in that stricken region.

"I see a well," remarked Amos. "We can get a refreshing drink, while Jean is asking his questions."

## CHAPTER XX

### UHLANS ON A TERROR RAID

During all those hours, while Jack and Amos, accompanied by their reliable guide, had been plodding onward, there was a constant rumble in the air. This had been going on for so long that a day when the dull, or more deafening roar, of artillery and bursting shells did not fret the atmosphere would be set down as most remarkable. As those who live close by a boiler shop grow accustomed to the awful din, so the peasants of the dismal valley had long ago become reconciled of hearing this savage growl of the unleashed dogs of war.

Near by, or far away, the French and German batteries were engaged in trying to knock each other out, and millions of dollars' worth of ammunition was being expended in pounding the cement trenches to pieces, preparatory to an attack in force.

The boys paid very little attention to the sounds, save when possibly they seemed to come closer than usual. Then they experienced a mild curiosity as to whether they might be made witnesses to some new battle.

As they arrived at the remains of the cottage and near the well, an old woman, almost doubled up with rheumatism, came out. The sight of Jean's uniform was apparently good for her eyes, to judge from the eager way she approached him. They were quickly engaged in earnest conversation; but not waiting to be invited Amos proceeded to draw a bucket of water from the well, and make use of the dilapidated gourd that hung there so invitingly.

The water was deliciously cool and pleasant, after all that dust they had swallowed on the road. Both he and Jack drank their fill, and pronounced it the equal of any water they had ever struck.

By and by old Jean turned to speak to them. They could see he was agitated, and guessed, before he said a single word, that he must have

struck a "warm trail." But Jack felt there was concern written on his wrinkled face as well as satisfaction.

"She remember ze party we are look for, young messieurs," Jean began. "Eet seem zat zey stop here to get ze drink, like eferybody does zat go along ze road, friend and foe alike, she says. Zis most excellent well, eet be known all over ze country. She say eet be ze only thing zey leave her zat ees worth anythings. Even at zat some of ze beasts tell her zey be tempt to put ze poison in zis well, so as to keep eet from gifing ze comfort to ze enemy!"

Amos turned a shade paler.

"Oh! my stars! but they didn't do such a vile thing," he exclaimed, "or the good dame would have warned us not to drink any of the water!"

"Eet ees all right, m'sieur," Jean hastened to assure him. "Listen, and I will tell you. She haf a good memory, zis old lady, for she describe to me what ze gentlemans look like, also ze pretty girl wif heem; and I am sure eet must haf been my friend, ze burgomaster, and Pauline."

"All this five months ago, eh, Jean?" asked Jack.

"She remember," added the other seriously. "Eet happen zat zen ze Boches zey were running about ze country looking for new zings to destroy, for ze order haf been given to retreat. She tell zat eet was that night she see fire in ze sky, and hear ze village haf been burn. Zen she learn how zey snipers shoot at German soldiers from ze houses, and so zey stand six noble citizens against ze wall and execute zem."

Amos looked blankly at Jack. He had heard so many horrible tales told along these lines that he could easily believe this fresh outrage. They had not early in the struggle understood the German principle that frightfulness may after all be the surest way to end a war.

"Jack, this may be the secret of the puzzle we're trying to solve," said Amos, as soon as he could command his tongue. "Mr. Dempsey and Pauline may have been in the little French village at the time the Boches fired it. Perhaps the good mayor was picked out as one of the six citi-

zens whose lives had to pay the penalty, because some silly hothead of a boy fired a gun from the window of a house."

Jack was serious. It struck him as well within the bounds of probability. Perhaps they were about to discover before the first day had fully passed why nothing further had ever been heard concerning the two pilgrims on the roundabout road to Paris.

"It wouldn't surprise me a bit, Amos, if that's what happened," he admitted. "Both of us heard Madame Villefue say that her friend the old burgomaster was a distinguished-looking man; and if the Germans started to pick six victims to execute, so as to terrify the people of the valley, they'd select Mr. Dempsey as one of them."

"And—Pauline, what of her?" asked Amos, twisting his hands together in a nervous state of apprehension.

"That's something we can only guess at," replied Jack. "She may have been left with one of the poor peasants in the desolated village. Or her beauty might have appealed to one of the

German officers, who'd think to send her back to his home, to be brought up as his daughter. Such things have happened, we've been told. They haven't been content to clean out the churches, take all the metal, even to sacred relics, and bells that have a history of a thousand years, to be melted down into munitions; but in many cases women and children have been sent by droves into Germany, to help with the harvest, they said, but what became of many of them no one will ever know."

Jack looked downcast. He felt that a crisis faced them, and they might be on the point of making a discovery which was going to be either a pleasant one or else prove a cruel shock.

"Does she not know whether the stranger was one of the six men who were shot by the Germans, Jean?" he asked the guide, who was waiting to ascertain what they wished him to do next.

Jean questioned the bent-over mistress of the roadside well. He once more turned to the boys, shaking his head as he spoke.

"Eet ees nothing she knows, young messieurs.

No one dares travel far away from ze home zese days. Zey try to raise ze green stuff in ze ruin garden, to keep life in ze body, but days come and days go. Eet ees always ze same. Sometimes zey see eet may be French soldiers, and zere hearts leap wif joy. Again ze Boches come, and hunt for anyzings zat haf been hidden away; always eet ees money zey look for, as eef zese poor peoples haf one sou left. But we will haf to go further along ze way to find out about M. Dempsey."

Both boys realized that Jean spoke the truth. They looked west. The ill-fated village had lain there, but from what they heard it was hardly likely that they could find a single house of it standing. The wretched inhabitants, if any of them still survived, were living in the cellars, where they may have constructed rude shelters that would protect them, in some measure, from the rain, and also the burning sun.

"We ought to make it by dark, if we start now, I should say," remarked Amos. "It can only be a few miles away from here. To think that all

of five months these people haven't dared cross over there at night-time, and see what happened. They are afraid of their lives on the road."

"Let's start," suggested Jack.

Although they were more or less "leg-weary," as Amos called it, from having kept on the move pretty much all day, the drink of cold water refreshed them considerably. Jean lingered to quaff a couple of gourds of the contents of the "moss-covered bucket that hung in the well," and then led the way along the country road.

They had not been on the move long when Jean discovered two mounted men coming toward them in the distance. Jack leveled his binoculars, and made a surprising as well as disagreeable announcement.

"They're German troopers, Jean!" he explained, at which Amos uttered a cry.

"Let's drop out of sight, in a hurry," he suggested hastily.

Fortunately, there was plenty of cover handy, and they lost no time in seeking the shelter of the friendly bushes, among which they pushed

until some little distance from the road. Here, screened by the gathering shadows of coming night, they crouched to watch the enemy pass by.

"I wonder if they chanced to notice us, Jack," ventured Amos in a whisper.

"Wait and see what happens," Jack told him.

They could hear the pounding of horses' hoofs. The couple came in sight, and the concealed trio plainly saw that they were Uhlans, for they carried lances, and bore all the marks of the German rough riders on a raid, such as has always made their name as much feared in Northern France as the Austrians on their part have dreaded the Russian Cossacks.

They pulled up when about opposite the place where the three lay.

"Don't move a hand, Amos!" whispered Jack warningly, lest the other be tempted to drop flat so as not to be seen, and knowing that such a movement would be the very thing calculated to betray their presence.

Sitting in their saddles the two Germans talked. Plainly they had noticed the three persons on the

road, though believing them to be peasants, and were arguing whether it would pay to dismount and thresh the shrubbery so as to rout them out.

The near approach of night decided them against trying this, coupled with the slim chances of their finding anything worth while on the wretched persons of French peasants who had been systematically forced to "stand and deliver" for almost three years now, so that they hardly owned a thing save the threadbare and torn clothes on their backs.

Accordingly, the horsemen again started along the road. Amos waved a hand after them when he felt they were no longer looking that way.

"Good-bye to bad rubbish!" he said under his breath. "What does this mean, Jack, Jean? Why are the Germans running wild again in this valley of desolation?"

"Zey are not alone, depend on zat!" snapped the guide, who had been fingering his revolver eagerly while the Uhlans sat in their saddles debating as to whether they should enter the woods or not; and doubtless Jean was also hoping deep

down in his heart they would decide to do so, since he believed he could fetch them both down with two shots.

"It promises to add to our troubles, I can plainly see," Jack admitted. "We must expect to run across other troopers at any time. The thud of a horse's hoofs on the road is bound to give us a cold chill, and we'll always have to keep an eye out for good shelter. But even that isn't going to keep us back. Jean, lead the way once more to the road, and we'll manage somehow or other to slink along until we get to what's left of the village, where we expect to learn what happened to M'sieur Dempsey and his little ward, Pauline!"

## CHAPTER XXI

### WHEN DARKNESS HAD FALLEN

It was rapidly growing dark, for the evening had come upon them swiftly, and gathering clouds also helped to shut off the last dim gleams of daylight. They knew they were close to the village, although only the dismal barking of a stray dog arose to tell of human occupancy. Faint lights pierced the gathering gloom, where possibly some peasant might be occupied in getting a frugal supper. As a rule, however, all such duties were done while the day lasted, because light cost money, and also wasted precious fats that were so difficult to procure.

"Look, here is the old village burial ground, Jack," said Amos, as he bent over a wall and stared at some white stones. "There are a number of graves that look as if they might have been made within a few months. Four, five, yes, six

of them are all in a row. Oh! I wonder now if these could hold the poor victims we heard about, who fell before the firing squad of the Germans."

It was an awe-inspiring thought, and Jack, too, felt a quiver pass over his frame while turning his eyes upon the mute mounds that lay side by side. He wondered if under one of those long ridges lay the old burgomaster, in whose charge Madame Villefue had placed her beloved grandchild, which she had done, as we know, resting in the firm belief that the good man would take her to a place of safety.

They were now drawing near one of the faint lights they had seen. Both boys decided that some sort of a house must stand there alongside the road, having been suffered to remain when so many others fell victims to the flames on that night of the conflagration and the high wintry wind.

"Isn't that horses I hear coming again, Jack?" asked Amos a little excitedly at this juncture.

Plainly the dull thuds reached Jack's ears. He made out two animals, and they came on as

though tired from many hours' galloping through the valley. They were also coming from behind, and it struck the boys as possible that the riders would prove to be the identical Uhlans they had watched from the bushes.

"Whew! I wonder now if those chaps are *looking for us?*" Amos ventured.

"Hardly likely," Jack surmised, "unless they managed to learn from some peasant that a soldier in the French blue, with two English-speaking boys, passed along this way. But I rather believe they've concluded to return for some other reason. It may be they suspect some of these wretched people are concealing something that would be worth carrying off, and have decided to ride back and try to make them show its hiding-place."

"Huh! I guess that would be just about like the pirates," gritted Amos. "But they're coming, and we don't want to stay in the road much longer I imagine, eh, Jack?"

"We'll step aside, and lie down until they go on," the other explained. "No great trouble hid-

ing, now that the darkness has commenced to gather."

Accordingly, they soon found a place that offered them a fair shelter. Here they flattened themselves out and waited. The pounding on the road grew closer, and in another minute or so they saw a pair of horsemen pass by slowly. It was too dark for Amos to make sure that the men were the same they had seen previously, though the horses seemed to correspond, and he really had little doubts concerning this fact.

They were already pulling in their mounts as though meaning to make a halt. Amos, remembering the dim light back of what seemed to be a window in a wall, fancied the two men anticipated coming on the peasant family as they were about to sit down to a frugal meal, which they meant to appropriate. Those who had prepared it might deem themselves fortunate to be allowed the privilege of continued existence.

He sniffed, as though scenting coming trouble for somebody besides the poor peasant family. All the sad pictures of desolation and vandalism

which they had seen evidences of during that day's tramp made Amos feel very bitter against those responsible for the destruction of humble homes, village churches, gardens, orchards, fields, even the harmless stone walls not escaping the general ruin of everything worth while that had taken the patient labor of many years to build up. He even felt that he could with great enthusiasm strike a solid blow against the ruthless despoilers of the valley, and really glory in the chance.

"They've stopped at that place, whatever it can be, Jack," he whispered, as they sat up again. "Now it used to be some sort of roadside inn that was left partly standing, and these fellows, knowing this, mean to force the people to feed them. We might as well hang around, and if they ride away again after getting supper, why, we could learn what we are dying to know, learn it here as well as at any other place."

"As you say, Amos, that's what our best plan would be," Jack agreed. "We'll creep a little bit closer. Perhaps we might risk taking a peep

through that window, which hasn't any glass in it, I wager. Watch, and make sure that *both* men go inside. We can't afford to take any unnecessary chances, you know."

"There, I saw one walk past the light at the door," announced Amos, almost immediately, "and by the same token there goes the second man. The coast is clear, Jack, so if we want to creep up and take a squint through the window, now's our golden opportunity."

As they cautiously advanced they could hear loud voices within the house. Apparently the two Uhlans were ordering those in the room to place a meal upon the table without ceremony, and accompanying their demands with a brutal display of weapons, as though threatening dire things unless wine or some other luxury were unearthed. They probably suspected that French people, even in these days of meagre stores, must always have a stray bottle or two hidden away that ought to be used to wash the dust down a lordly Teuton conqueror's throat.

Jean was mumbling to himself, as though the

very sound of those deep guttural voices using German strong words irritated him very much. So Amos could imagine a bull must always feel when some one waves a red flag at him.

They drew closer. The two horses at the door stamped as though desirous of informing their masters that it was past their customary feeding hour. Amos felt like stepping over and setting the animals free, with a cut of a stick to start them down the road; but he resisted the boyish inclination. It would be unwise to do anything calculated to enrage those rough riders, since the only poor peasants of the valley would be the ones to suffer the consequences.

The abusive language grew louder. They could also catch a whining voice, that might belong to some old woman, trying to protest that there was really not a drop of any sort of wine to be had in all that vicinity for love or money. Possibly she was also trying to explain how they had been compelled to deliver the bottle they were keeping for emergencies, as medicine, to the last Germans who came along, months ago, and that

the new crop of grapes had not yet ripened sufficiently to be pressed.

It made the blood of Amos boil to discover how those two domineering men were plainly bent on bullying the occupants of the rooms, because unable to secure what they had evidently ridden back for. Were they to stand there and listen, perhaps see with their own eyes a poor old woman struck, and knocked down by a brute who chanced to be garbed in the uniform of the Kaiser's Uhlans? He hoped Jack would not think of persuading old Jean to hold back when the Frenchman felt impelled to rush in and attack the raiders.

Indeed, Amos was clenching his hands. He gritted his teeth when, after managing to secure a peep through the window, he saw one of the troopers give a small urchin chancing to get in his way, a brutal shove. It sent the little chap in a heap in a corner, where he sat whimpering and looking so pitiful, too afraid of his life to cry aloud at his hurts.

Prudence would advise that they do nothing to

betray their presence to those rough men; but then there may be times when boys with red blood in their veins must decline to listen to cold reason, when they are forced to allow themselves to be urged on by different motives, regardless of personal danger.

Jack had linked his arm in that of old Jean. He feared lest the Frenchman might be unable to see any of his kind buffeted about so cruelly. Jack may have intended to restrain Jean from rushing in and taking upon himself the task of righting the old peoples' wrongs. If that were really his design he soon found reason to change his mind.

Upon the bare board had been placed all the meagre supper evidently meant to keep body and soul together on the part of the little family of old persons and youngsters. From the gestures of the inn-keeper Amos judged that he had been offering this freely to the two big troopers, even while continuing to deplore the necessity which forced him to deny them the luxury they craved of wine. Still they insisted that he produce a bottle, nor would they believe a word he said.

Then one of the men struck him. Amos could see the blood come as the old man was hurled violently to the floor, striking his head against some projection. The white-haired woman shrieked, and threw herself down beside her husband. Then the same brute deliberately kicked her, so that she, too, was thrown over.

Flesh and blood could stand for no more. Jack released his grip on the arm of the man whose breast was decorated with France's highest military medal for extraordinary valor shown upon the field of battle.

It was like unleashing a hound that has been madly straining at the cord. Jean shot forward as though made of india-rubber. Both boys were at his heels, bent on having a hand in the mix-up, if it was bound to come. They could not allow Jean to face two huge ruffians who would think it a most delightful thing to pot a man wearing the French uniform.

He went through that partly open door like a cannon-ball. Almost before either of the German soldiers realized that there had been an accession

to the number of persons in the apartment, old Jean had closed with the man who had done this dreadful thing. His fury passed all bounds as he swept the Uhlan from his feet, and hurled him into a corner almost as violently as the other had done the inn-keeper.

Amos and Jack turned on the second German. He was a strong man, who might, under ordinary conditions, have easily been a match for the pair of them; but they now had the advantage of a surprise attack, and also of the impetus which their forward rush gave them.

He made a movement as if to draw a weapon. Too late! Jack launched himself forward like a thunderbolt, striking lustily as he came. Amos, too, clung desperately to the man's right arm, with the idea of lessening his powers of resistance. The whole room was in a dreadful uproar, the children shrinking back, and now sending up feeble shrieks of terror. The eldest lad, not yet nine years of age, picking up a knife from the table made vicious lunges at the nearer German. Those youngsters of Northern France had

learned many bitter lessons during the three sad years that had crept along. A Boche to them meant a demon to be hated even as most children do the mysterious terrors that haunt graveyards, and come to visit them in their dreams at night.

All this consumed but a minute of time, and then it came to an abrupt finish.

## CHAPTER XXII

### AT THE ROADSIDE INN

Amos had succeeded in disarming the man with whom he and Jack struggled. They really had little to fear from him. The fellow showed signs of great alarm. It was only natural under the circumstances. He and his comrade had been caught while engaged in an act of extreme cruelty, and he knew the French soldiers would be justified in cutting them down, with no thought of mercy.

Amos swung the man's sabre menacingly. He had no thought of using the formidable weapon unless the fellow started forward and attacked them again; but the German did not know this, and expected to receive just the same treatment as he would have meted out had he been a victor in the little mêlée.

Being by nature built along the lines of a bully,

he showed the white feather when he found that the battle had gone against him. For that matter, however, he could hardly be blamed. If there was one French soldier on the spot how many others might there be hidden in the vicinity?

Amos made a gesture with the steel blade, and the trooper responded with a mad plunge for the door. The second fellow, not wishing to be left alone to meet the combined rush of three enemies, started to copy his example, though his face seemed to be all gory from the rough handling he had received through Jean.

Jean would have jumped after him with the intention of cutting the man down on the spot, but Jack got in the way, not wishing to continue the punishment further. In that he made a mistake, which must have flashed over his mind just as soon as the German trooper had vanished through the doorway.

They heard a great clattering of hoofs, which told how the frightened men had flung themselves into their saddles and raced off. Amos laughed. It struck him as most comical; but he

quickly changed his mind about this when old Jean started to reproach Jack on account of having prevented him from having finished the second trooper.

"It was a mistake, I allow," admitted Jack. "I'm half sorry I let myself feel even the least bit for the rascal."

Amos listened and looked while the old Frenchman shrugged his shoulders in his usual way and went on to say:

"Me, I am disturb, young m'sieur. Eet ees because zey will come again eef zey run across more of zere breed. Zen, you see, eet will be bad for zis poor familee here, very bad. Eet would be much better to let me knock ze viper on hees head."

"You're right, Jean," said Jack, nodding. "But we had allowed his mate to skip, and one would be just as bad to fetch the crowd here as two. Anyhow it's done, and there's no use of crying over spilled milk. What can't be cured must be endured. Let's hope they won't find any of their class, or that some Frenchmen in blue may be

coming along here before anything serious happens."

That was really all they could do, hope things might not take the bad turn Jean feared. Likely enough French soldiers might come galloping over the road in this still disputed territory.

Jack and Amos forgot all about the danger of remaining. The pitiful sight of the poor old woman bending over her stricken husband, the inn-keeper, aroused all their compassion, and they lost no time in idleness when they knew so much about rendering first aid to the injured.

It was really fine to see how those young fellows busied themselves. They lifted the old man to a convenient cot, upon which they laid him, groaning, and evidently suffering both in mind and body. Amos hastened to find a poor excuse for a metal basin into which he poured some water from a pail he discovered handy on a side table in a corner. He commandeered the first article in the way of soft linen, regardless of how valuable it might be in the estimation of these humble folks. When the necessity arises

such things must count for absolutely nothing in the eyes of a surgeon; at any rate, so Amos decided.

He set to work with a skill that caused the children, as well as the good housewife, to stand and gaze upon him with wonder and awe. Tenderly he proceeded first of all to wash away the blood, so as to see what the wounds looked like. He found that while they had bled considerably, and would show more or less discoloration later on, they were not serious.

Next Amos used a little of the soothing and healing salve which nowadays he always made it a point to carry along with him, never knowing when an occasion might arise that called for surgical treatment. Finally he took out a small roll of adhesive surgical tape, with which he proceeded to attach a small piece of linen to the old man's lacerated skin.

Really, it was no bungling job. Jack was proud of his chum. The experience they were getting in these strenuous days promised to push the education of Amos along famously, and if this

kept up he would make his mark eventually along this particular line.

By now the old inn-keeper was feeling much better, while his wife no longer trembled and moaned. Instead her eyes filled with mute admiration and gratitude as they were fastened on first Amos, and then his companion. Surely those American boys must have assumed the aspect of angels in human guise, coming at such an opportune moment when everything seemed lost. As long as that poor French woman breathed she would remember them, morning, noon and night, as messengers sent from above in answer to her inarticulate prayers for help.

Jean was talking volubly with her. The boys guessed that he might be asking questions relative to the particular subject in which they felt so much interest. She nodded often in the affirmative, at which the sergeant's wrinkled countenance would take on a grim smile. From this the observing Jack jumped to the conclusion their guide was learning something that gave him more or less pleasure, something connected with the

events that had occurred five months or so previously.

Jack waited, his pulses beating faster than their wont. He hoped they were going to pick up pleasing news relative to the presence of M. Dempsey and little Pauline. What a fine thing it would be, should they discover the one they sought close by! That would repay them a thousandfold for what little they had been able to do in connection with these poor people. Jack told himself as he waited to learn what Jean was finding out, that it would be a good case of "bread cast upon the waters returning ere many days." The little good turn they had been so willing to do would be finding its own reward.

Amos, on his part, still lingered at the cot on which the inn-keeper lay. He adjusted the bandage he had constructed for a second injury, and showed all the solicitude which a surgeon would bestow upon a patient on whose welfare his reputation had been staked.

It was at this moment that one of the children, who had wandered outside, came rushing in with

a white face, and fright showing in his eyes. Jack sensed some fresh trouble as soon as he saw the little chap, for he believed he could read the signs aright. One or both of those troopers must be coming back, intent on having speedy revenge for the injury that had been done to body and feelings.

The boy commenced to splutter something. Jack was unable to make out a single word of what he was trying to say, but he did note that the little fellow cast an occasional look of mortal fear toward the open door, as though the cause of his fright lay in that quarter.

"Find out what he's trying to say, Jean!" exclaimed Jack, rising to the occasion, for he knew that there was not a second to waste.

The soldier thereupon laid a heavy hand on the squirming child and proceeded to interrogate him in French. They could see the boy nod his head eagerly again and again as he caught the meaning of what the old man said to him. Then he would break out with a few words, though his

teeth were chattering in such a fashion that he could speak only with extreme difficulty.

Jean whirled on his two young friends.

"Eet ees ver' bad what he tell me!" he snapped out.

"They are coming, then?" demanded Jack.

"Horses, plenty of zem, he say. Zis boy he know ze clatter of ze horse hoofs on ze road. We must get out of here, young m'sieur, and zat in ze hurry, too!"

"All right, Jean, we'll vacate, though I hate to leave these poor people here to be knocked around by those brutes of troopers!" said Jack.

Amos, too, looked sad, and was muttering half under his breath as he started after the others:

"Oh! what wouldn't I give to have half a dozen of Pershing's khaki boys right here now to wait for those German house-burners! Say, what wouldn't we do to them? I bet they'd think they had run smack up against a threshing machine! Wouldn't we flatten the wine guzzlers out, though?"

Unfortunately, there was not the remotest

chance of such a delightful event coming to pass. Pershing and his expeditionary force chanced to be many miles away, far back of the lines, persistently drilling so as to be able to accomplish their part in the taming of the wild beast that the Kaiser had let loose upon a trusting and unprepared world at large. Their time had not yet come, though there were signs a-plenty that before Christmas had arrived American troops would be occupying a small portion of the fighting line, and coming in contact with the enemy.

Much to their regret they had to hurry out of the old inn upon the roadside. The darkness had meanwhile increased so that it screened their movements from observation. Amos, listening, was able to distinctly hear the crash of many shod hoofs on the road, and from this he knew that a body of horsemen was coming swiftly toward the spot. Indeed, they were already close by, and he more than half expected that shots might greet their passing out of the inn, should the dim light of the candles in the room reveal their presence.

No such thing happened, fortunately, and they were able to hurry away. Jean was in the van, good old Jean, who seemed to know just what should be done in an emergency such as this.

"We mustn't go too far away, Jean," said Jack presently.

Some terrible fascination gripped him, so that while he dreaded to listen to the cries of pain that he fully expected to hear from the inn, when the infuriated German troopers descended like a flight of war-hawks upon the place, still somehow Jack could not bear to wholly abandon that wretched family.

Closer came the heavy thud of many hoofs. Now they were drawing near the partly ruined building under the roof of which the little family had remained through so many dreary months of terror and suffering, simply because they had no other shelter to keep them from the rigors of the wintry weather.

"They're spreading out so as to surround the place," whispered Amos, keeping his head close to that of his chum.

"It's lucky for us we got away when we did," the other told him. "They hope to find us still there, and would make short work of the whole three."

"Bless that kid for coming inside with his news," muttered Amos. Then he fell silent, his heart seeming almost to stand still with suspense; he was expecting to hear pitiful cries rising from the inmates of the roadside tavern.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### ONCE MORE TO THE RESCUE

Jean was uneasy.

"Eef you wish to remain here, me, I would like to go on and see eef perhaps I might make some deescovery," he said to Jack.

Already the German troopers were inside the inn, and they could hear their loud voices as they demanded to know what had become of the three strangers. Jack understood. Jean was anxious to get his mission completed as quickly as possible. He wished to return to his regiment. Perhaps he suspected that some great forward movement was contemplated, and it would grieve him very much if by any chance he could not do his part toward ridding his beloved France of the terrible burden that had been laid upon her for so many months.

"All right, Jean, do whatever you think best,"

Jack told him. "We'll make this tree our rendezvous, and meet here again later on."

The "tree" was only an apology for such. Every branch of any size had been either destroyed by shellfire, or else chopped down by the enemy before this section of the once beautiful country had been abandoned to the oncoming French. Still, it answered Jack's purpose as a land-mark.

Jean at once left them, vanishing in the darkness. He took a route that would bring him to the site of the ruined village, only a hundred or two yards away from the place where the roadside inn stood. Jack put the old Frenchman out of his mind for the time being, because there were so many other things to think of.

"Oh! listen to them badgering that poor old couple about, will you?" Amos was saying, half under his breath, and Jack could actually hear him gritting his teeth together furiously.

All sorts of sounds came welling forth from the inn. The children were wailing, although in a half-restrained way, as though almost fright-

ened out of their wits; and screams from the old woman seemed to proclaim some fresh bullying tactics being employed, so as to vent upon the heads of these helpless people the fury that was felt toward the three who had disappeared.

It gave both the boys great pain to crouch there and listen, knowing how utterly powerless they were to remedy matters. Every cry that came to their ears caused them to resolve again and again that hereafter they would never venture to feel any sympathy for the cause represented by such inhuman war measures.

"Oh, I'm glad that Uncle Sam is right at this business now, and has rolled up his sleeves to wade in!" said Amos half under his breath. He certainly meant every word of it, too!

On the occasion of their former visit to the French war trenches, earlier in the great conflict, the two boys, knowing that their country was trying to maintain a neutral attitude, always endeavored to hold a fair opinion of the Germans. On several occasions, indeed, they had gone out of their way to render assistance to

some one of those fighters wearing the Kaiser's uniform. Once it had been an unfortunate aviator whose machine had gone wrong, and dropped him into the top of a tall tree, where he became entangled, and might have died only that Jack and Amos came along, and discovering his plight rescued him, even helping him to hide so as to escape capture.

But those days were now long since past. The great free republic across the sea had been unable to resist Destiny, calling her in stentorian tones to take her proper place in the lead of the democratic nations engaged against autocracy in this terrible life and death struggle to decide the fate of civilization for all time.

So the boys were allowing their real feelings to have full sway these days. While they might still have a warm feeling for the German people, at the same time so long as the whole Teuton nation allowed itself to believe in those cruel and inhuman methods of the military classes, so long would they have to bear the detestation, perhaps hatred, of the rest of mankind.

While they stood under the tree, listening to the rough voices of the German troopers and the cries of pain and terror that they drew from those poor people of the inn, the two chums rejoiced in their hearts that Pershing was even then on French soil, his little army the seed of promise of great things which the liberty-loving American people had now solemnly sworn to do before they would ever consent to sheathe the sword so reluctantly drawn against their one-time friends, the German people.

"Oh! I do believe they're going to get off at last!" said Amos finally, with great relief in his voice. "We can see to their hurts again, poor things, if they're still alive. How I detest those Uhlans! They've been coached in the art of cruelty toward their foes; and the trouble is they count even innocent people among those they oppress."

Jack, too, rejoiced that at last the troopers gave signs of mounting as though meaning to depart. He did not feel as though he could have

stood much more if the cries of pain had continued.

The candles still burned, and they could see the burly figures of the Germans issuing from the inn, and mounting their horses that had been left outside in charge of a guard. There was another round of loud talking, and Amos could also catch jeering voices. Then came the clatter of many hoofs; the Uhlans had gone!

"I only wish I had two of Pershing's boys," grumbled Amos, "and that we were hidden down there along the road, with a nice machine gun! Oh! wouldn't I take savage delight in sprinkling that bunch with lead? I warrant you not one of them would get away to tell the tale. What ought we do now, Jack?"

"There's only one thing we can do," replied the other.

"Go back to the inn, I suppose you mean, eh, Jack?"

"You've got patients there who ought to be looked after. I'm a whole lot afraid we'll find

their condition more serious than before, and you'll have your work to do over again, Amos."

"That's all right," snapped the other. "I'd do that willingly a dozen times. I'm sorry for the old couple. See here, Jack, what does this mean? They've lit more candles, don't you think, because——why, the whole place looks to be just aglow! Could those raiders have set fire to the inn, do you think?"

"Just what they have!" ejaculated the other excitedly. "Come along, Amos, we've got to hustle and save those folks, likewise try to keep their poor home from going up in smoke!"

They did not even stop to consider whether there would be any peril connected with this step. For aught they knew the Germans might have left several of their number in concealment inside the building, while the fire was started, in hopes of luring the boys back; and that at the proper moment these hidden marksmen would mow them down without warning.

Both ran hastily forward. They could see one of the children jumping up and down in a fran-

tic manner in front of the house by the roadside, apparently too frightened to even scream. As they looked they discovered that the boy was trying with might and main to drag his grandmother's body out of the open door. It was uncertain whether the old woman had swooned or had been killed; but no matter which it might prove to be, the horror of the scene would never be forgotten by either Jack or Amos.

They hastened to take hold and get the woman safely out. The interior of the building was full of dense smoke. The red flames could be seen licking up the dry woodwork. Those German raiders had been trying their hands with such tactics for so many months, even years, that they had become wonderfully proficient in the art of fire-making. They knew just how to proceed so as to insure a building's destruction in the shortest possible space of time.

Having deposited the motionless body of the old woman in a place of safety, the boys hurried back. They knew they must rescue the innkeeper as well, and then turn their attention to

trying to save the miserable building, which meant so much for the almost desolate family.

No longer having any fear that Germans still hovered near the scene, they could work with freer minds. So both of them plunged inside the house. The smoke was dense and suffocating. It got in their eyes, and made the tears come, so that they were half blinded.

How fortunate that they remembered what the interior of that room was like! They moved confidently in utter darkness, the pall of pungent smoke failing to confuse them.

Groping their way across the room, they felt the cot just where they remembered seeing it. A groan told them the old man still reclined there, and was still alive.

The boys took hold and lifted the cot bodily, as though it might be a stretcher—such as they had handled when helping the Red Cross workers after a battle. Back to the open door they went. Fortunately the aperture proved to be wide enough to permit them to take through the narrow cot. In this fashion did they carry out

their rôle of rescuers. Truly that French family would have abundant cause to remember those gallant sons of America.

It was not Jack's intention to stop. He had a natural antipathy toward fire, when the devouring element was trying to burn up some one's home. Humble as this roadside inn might be, since parts of the structure had been bitten off by passing shells, and other portions devoured by previous conflagrations, happily subdued before they accomplished the utter destruction of the building, it was all the occupants expected to have between them and the coming winter. Consequently it meant as much in their case as an elegant mansion would to its owner, perhaps much more.

"Try and find a bucket, or something that will hold water, Amos!" cried Jack.

That pleased Amos. He hastened to run around to the rear of the house, thinking to find some half worn-out tin utensils that could be pressed into service, though long since discarded as not worth while. There must be a cistern

somewhere, Jack was figuring, from which they could dip water. The flames had not yet gained such an ascendency that they might not be subdued by concerted and vigorous action on the part of the amateur fire department.

The old couple had been left in the care of the oldest boy, while the other children also clustered about their stricken grandparents, and watched what the young Americans were doing, their eyes round with wonder and awe.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### A WONDERFUL DISCOVERY

Amos had succeeded in finding a rusty old tin bucket. It would leak, to be sure, but he concluded he could make it answer his purpose provided water was to be found. He did not know which way to turn in order to look for a cistern, or a well like that one at which they had obtained such a delicious drink only a short time before.

Jack was rushing around as though at a loss to discover the badly needed water supply. He, too, had picked up a big pan that could be made serviceable in time of need.

"Have you seen anything of a well back there, Amos?" he asked.

Amos felt his heart fail him.

"Why, there doesn't seem to be anything that

I can see, Jack!" he exclaimed, in tones of dismay. "Whatever shall we do? It's a heap too far to think of running all the way back to that house of the fine well."

"Listen!" snapped Jack, "you go on searching for the water supply. I'll run and try to make that boy understand what we want. He ought to be able to show us."

So Amos turned back. He meant to scour the ground in the rear of the inn, hoping that his first effort had not covered sufficient territory. Surely there must be some kind of a place where water was kept, if only he could find it. Should he be able to do this before Jack came again, it would always be a feather in his cap.

He was dodging this way and that, looking under every scrap of board he could discover, and even lifting flat stones in the hope they might conceal the mouth of a cistern, when he became aware of the fact that some one had drawn near and was watching his eccentric movements, evidently in wonder.

Amos, looking up, discovered that it was a small, black-eyed girl, undoubtedly from some other family not far away, who, attracted by the light of the fire, must have wandered over to see what was happening, despite the orders of her parents to "mind your own business, for the Germans are around."

Amos was thinking only of his eager desire to find a supply of water. The fire was gaining fast headway, and would soon reach a pitch where their most strenuous efforts would fail to subdue it in time to save the old portion of the inn.

He believed he remembered what the French for water was, and so pronouncing that one word again and again, he shook his old bucket and pointed to the house, where a red flame could be seen darting like the tongue of a serpent from a window.

At first she seemed puzzled to know what he meant, but his suggestive motions must have done more than his wretched French. She seïzed him

by the arm and led him to a shed, where he just managed to make out a box surrounding a cistern-top, with a rope and bucket as a means for lifting the much needed liquid.

Amos got busy without another thought of the little peasant girl whose quick wit had risen superior to his blundering use of the native language. He succeeded in filling his bucket with two turns. It did not leak *very* much, Amos, upon making a hasty examination, saw to his delight.

He started off in haste, leaving the small girl commencing to draw another bucket of water, which she evidently meant to empty into a tub standing close by.

On the way Amos met his chum running toward the shed. Apparently Jack had managed to pick up a little information himself, and was on the way to fill his big pan.

"You found it, did you, Amos?" he called out, as they met alongside the house.

"Sure. Little French girl showed me. She's

filling a tub in the shed. Go to it, Jack, old boy! We'll soon smother that fire, believe me!"

He boldly entered the inn, and finding where he could apply the contents of his bucket to the best advantage, emptied it. After that he ran like the wind to get outdoors again, and headed for the shed in the rear. On the way he met Jack coming along with his pan filled to the brim.

"Hurrah! That's the thing!" cried the excited and exultant Amos, as he passed by. "I'll be along right on your heels!"

They did considerable sprinting in the next ten minutes. Back and forth both of them hurried, throwing the water where it was most needed. The fire was dying down, though they did not stop until they had it completely under control.

"Wonder if the supply will hold out?" panted Amos, on one occasion, when they again chanced to meet on the trail around the house.

"That's all right; plenty in the cistern, for I sounded it to see," he was assured.

"And the poor, tired little peasant girl, what of her?" called Amos, looking back.

"Still standing up to the job like a dandy," Jack told him, "drawing bucket after bucket, and seeming to be able to bear it all right."

"She's sure a peach of a French girl!" Amos told himself, as he ran over to the shed to fill his bucket again.

Yes, the girl was still lowering and drawing up. It was no small task, either, for one so young, and Amos marveled at her persistence, even while he vainly tried to think of some French word that would express his admiration for her splendid courage.

A few more trips, and Jack declared that there was really no need of doing anything further, since the last vestige of fire had been put out. The old inn, with such a history surrounding its survival of the war, had been once more spared utter destruction. To the American boys the honor went; only for their vim and determination it would have been completely gutted by fire.

Jack could now begin to once more think of the aged couple.

"The smoke seems to have subsided, Amos," he was saying, "and perhaps we'd better try and move them back to the inn. The old man will be much more comfortable there. I'm hoping that his wife only swooned through fear of those Germans, and that she hasn't been badly injured."

Amos had been about to propose something along those very lines himself, so that he did not have the least objection to offer. Much as he wished to be getting along so as to learn whether there was going to be any luck in store for them, he could not think of leaving his patients without further attention. His boyish heart was filled to overflowing with pity toward the poor inn-keeper and his family, who had suffered so acutely through the hands of those cruel Uhlans.

When they reached the spot where they had left the others they found that the woman was busily engaged in caring for her husband, al-

though she had been herself the recipient of fresh blows since Amos last had ministered to them.

The man on the cot was trying to comfort her, and together they made a sad spectacle that wrung the hearts of the boys, as well as enlisted their sympathies in behalf of the stricken ones.

It was not so very difficult to carry the man on the cot back to the room from whence they had so recently removed him. He tried hard to repress his groans and tell Jack how grateful they were for all that had been done.

Once again did Amos set to work in the endeavor to soothe his grievous wounds. He uttered many a low but fierce expression of resentment as he found the marks of blows upon the poor old man, showing how one or more of the Germans must have vented their rage upon him. Amos suspected that it must have been those fellows who ran like cowards on the former occasion; for only men of that type, and not brave fighters, could descend to striking one unable to ward off or return a blow. He would say no less

of a Frenchman, a Britisher, or even an American who was guilty of such an action, though he could not believe it possible there could be found such among the Allies.

Amos worked swiftly. He did not mean to leave until he had accomplished his end, but at the same time felt impelled to make haste. He was urged on by his own eager longing to learn whether old Jean was meeting with any sort of success in his inquiries among the few people still remaining in the devastated village.

Jack stood and watched his chum. Whenever the other needed a helping hand with a bandage Jack was there ready to give a lift. The children, too, were intensely interested in the operations, and their eyes expressed this, even though not a word was spoken by any one of them.

Then suddenly Jack noticed that there had been an addition to the group. The small girl from some neighbor's had vainly waited for them to come and fill their buckets until, consumed with curiosity because of the long delay, she had

left the shed and passed around to the door. Now she was looking in, and was also interested in that clever surgical work of Amos.

He had used up a fair portion of his limited amount of surgeon's tape in dressing the numerous wounds of the aged couple. They certainly looked as though they had been in a lively fight; any one seeing them would suspect that there might be a Red Cross hospital unit near by, into whose hands they had luckily fallen.

Jack conceived an idea. While waiting there for Amos to complete his work, what was to hinder him from endeavoring to learn whether old M. Dempsey, the burgomaster of a village utterly destroyed and wiped out, had stopped there five months back, just about the time trouble fell upon that community, and if so whither had he gone with his little charge?

He beckoned to the girl. At first she seemed to hesitate about entering the room, as though not certain what would come of it. Doubtless, in stealing forth to learn the meaning of all those

strange sounds, she had already gone much farther than her folks would have permitted.

But when Jack smiled in his convincing and pleasant way, and again crooked his finger, making a gesture she could not misunderstand, the girl seemed to get over her shyness, and entered the room.

Jack summoned all his knowledge of French to the fore, and launched a question. It was accompanied by many grimaces intended to supplement the query itself. Having delivered himself of this, Jack watched to see what the result might be. He began to fear he had failed to use the right words, somehow, or had given them a wrong inflection. The little girl seemed to ponder over what he had said. Then she shook her head, and thus told him plainly she did not understand.

So Jack went at it a second time, trying harder than before to get the right words. He might have mastered a short sentence, but a long question was too much for him. Plainly he began to

fear, when she shook her head again and smiled sweetly up in his face, he must wait until old Jean arrived, who would be able to interrogate those present. It was too bad they had not thought to have him do that before, while Amos was first attending to his duties as a surgeon of standing.

Jack looked down at the girl. She was surely laughing at his poor French. He felt abashed to realize how small was his knowledge of the language when he had been flattering himself that he would be able to make his way anywhere about France, and had become quite a French student.

Then she addressed him as though some new idea had just at that moment flashed into her mind.

"You do not speak very good French, m'sieur; if you asked me in English, I might be able to tell you!"

Jack, thrilled at hearing her say this, caught hold of her arm.

"You speak English, then? You are not a French girl?" he cried eagerly.

"My dear mother was French, and my grandmother, too; but me—I am an American, and my name is Pauline Winters!"

## CHAPTER XXV

### HEADED TOWARD HOME

"What's happened, Jack?" demanded Amos, bustling up, having discovered that his chum was occupied in trying to engage the little black-eyed "French" girl in conversation, and seemed to be having a hard time of it.

"Why, nothing much," gasped Jack, beginning to smile broadly, "only after all our frantic hunting it seems that Pauline Winters has found us! Would you believe it, this girl who has been working with us to put out the fire tells me that is her name?"

Amos had a stroke, and could not say a single word for nearly half a minute, just continuing to stare at the surprised girl as though he could devour her. Really, she looked just as astonished

to hear what Jack was saying, for up to that moment she could never have suspected that these two boys were also Americans, and that they would know her name.

"Oh! what does it all mean?" she asked, with trembling lips. "You seem to know my name. Yes, I am Pauline Winters, and my grandmother is Madame Villefue. I was on my way to Paris in charge of good old M'sieur Dempsey when the terrible Germans fell upon this village. They said some one had fired on their officers from a peasant's home, and that six of the leading villagers must pay the price. And, oh! how can I tell you, they picked my dear friend out for the first one. Then I lived with a family named Roquet, who had once known my grandmother, and so took me in; but it has been a sad time, because often we have had little to eat. Yet they shared everything with me, who had no claim on them. But please tell me who you are, and how you come to know about poor little Pauline Winters."

Jack went up and took the little girl's hand.

He saw that she was no ordinary child. Bright and precocious by nature, the dreadful experiences through which Pauline had passed ever since the great war broke out had made her unusually observing. She talked like one many years older than her years stamped her.

"Why," said Jack, with a warmth in his voice that told how his heart was beating with delight, "we've come all the way from America just to find you, Pauline. Your own mother has sent us, for we live not so very far from you. She is stopping at our house, and has been very sick; but the doctor assured us that if only her little girl, Pauline, could be found, and safely restored to her arms, she would soon be herself again. So we undertook the mission, for it happened that both of us had been abroad before, and in the French war trenches as well. We have seen and talked with your good grandmother, and it was she who put us on the track of M'sieur Dempsey."

"Then my dear grandmother is still alive and

well?" cried the girl, her face lighting up with what must have been relief, for all these dreadful months she had undoubtedly been worrying her little heart over the possible fate of the old lady who stubbornly refused to forsake her ruined home, even though the Germans continually threatened to knock the last tower down over her head, and the French shells frequently exploded on her lawn.

Jack shot a quick and expressive look toward Amos. It told the other not to breathe a single word concerning the probable fate of Madame Villefue until they had consulted, and agreed on a programme. What was the need of adding to the burden this innocent girl had been long forced to bear? She must be kept in ignorance, for a time at least. Perhaps, later on, when she had recovered from the shock she had endured, and was safe in her mother's loving arms, she might be told of the tragic event that had marked the last act in the drama of the once magnificent Villefue Chateau.

Then came Jean, having learned news in the ruined village that sent him quickly to tell his two young friends. Imagine his astonishment nd joy when he discovered that Fate had out-itted him, and that the long-lost Pauline was ually talking with her new friends, and look-g very happy in the thought that she would speedily be on her way to partake of a mother's love.

"We mustn't lose any time about getting away from here," suggested Amos. "Those German raiders may return and give us heaps of trouble."

"There ees nothing to fear," said Jean proudly. "As I left to find you, eet ees a French mounted scout that reach ze village. He tells me zere ees a French force coming along, and will arrive ver' soon. Now zat you haf find ze leetle girl, so zat my help will be no longer needed, I haf decide to accompany ze brave French lancers, eef zey are to gif chase to ze Huns. I will nevaire be happy eef ze house-burners and ze old-woman whippers

safe away get. Me, Jean Duval, it would please to kill five, seex, or ten."

Almost while he thus spoke from the depths of his honestly indignant heart, they heard the cheery note of a cavalry bugle. A body of horsemen came along the road. The Frenchmen had heard of the late visit of the raiding Uhlans and evidently intended to chase after them, in hopes of forcing a meeting, when they might in part avenge the insults that had been put upon the poor natives of that region.

Jean stopped them and entered into a spirited conversation with the officer in charge. He hurried over to squeeze the hands of his two boy friends.

"Eet ees to say au revoir, and good luck to both of you. Some fine day you will write to Jean Duval, and tell heem how you arrive home. Me, I shall accompany zese noble Frenchmen, and pray for a chance to pay ze barbarians for what zey haf here done. Luckily we haf a spare horse for me. So eet ees to say good-bye!"

They saw him ride away with the dark host of galloping horsemen, and many times in the future both Jack and Amos remembered brave old Jean Duval, who already proudly wore his decoration and had devoted his life to his country, content to make the great sacrifice if by so doing he might only serve France.

Amos once more proceeded to attend to his patients, and saw that both the old people were resting fairly well before he would consent to leave them. Having received a hint from the grateful inn-keeper concerning an old horse that might be hired at a hovel farther along the road, they proceeded thither.

Later on that night the three of them were settled in a rickety old vehicle, drawn by a "slab-sided crowbait of a nag," according to the description Amos gave whenever he tried to tell the story, and headed toward distant Paris.

They met with all manner of moving forces after they once reached the main road—bodies of marching soldiers, ambulances returning to the

front, and artillery on the gallop. They also overtook fugitives from the region of battle, unable to longer endure the horrors that had been their portion for long dreary months.

The horse managed to take them a matter of thirteen miles, and was then so utterly exhausted that the boys would not hear of the peasant trying to proceed any farther. They paid him the full price that had been agreed on, and then put up at a little tavern to wait for the coming of day, when they expected to start again, this time on foot, but always headed for Paris, and home.

It took them four full days to make the journey, not that the distance was so great, or that they were held up by the girl's being unable to keep step with her two protectors; but the nearer they drew to the great French capital the more congested did they find the roads, so that progress had to be necessarily slow.

But in the end they arrived, and from that time on anxiety "took flight out of the window."

They found Paris very subdued in comparison

with what it must have been before the war. Everywhere they saw signs of sacrifice. It showed in the mourning worn by the mothers, wives and sisters of the half million gallant Frenchmen who had lain down their lives on the field of battle for a noble purpose, which a grateful world would one day look upon as the most glorious deed in all history. Still everywhere they found the people just as grimly determined as ever that the war should go on and on until the grand aim they had in view was attained. Alsace and Lorraine, the Lost Provinces, must again become French, and the world be relieved from the ogre of militarism, so that a lasting peace could descend upon the blood-soaked earth.

The fever of adventure still raged in the hearts of the two lads from across the sea. They constantly met Americans in their walks about Paris, and even saw General Pershing again when the commander made one of his flying trips to the capital to consult with the heads of the French Nation. To tell the truth, neither of the boys

seemed to be wholly satisfied to go back again to their native land while such wonderful events were about to break forth. They felt an almost irresistible temptation to stay there yet a while, and be in a position to see the first coming of the Pershing Iron Men on the battle front; for they learned that the expeditionary force would be going to the trenches soon, since their education in the arts of modern warfare had been almost completed.

What caused this indecision on the part of both Jack and Amos was the fact that they had accidentally learned how a gentleman and his wife, well-known Americans, whose acquaintance they had made, and who were very much interested in Pauline, would be delighted to take charge of the little girl, and promised to deliver her safely to the mother.

It was a terrible temptation to Jack and Amos. While they waited for a chance to get berths aboard the first available vessel bound from a French port for America, they argued the matter

over again and again, trying to convince themselves that it would not be wrong for them to commit Pauline to the care of others. Of course they had already cabled the good news across, and had reason to hope that the message, having been duly censored, might be permitted to proceed, so that the anxiety of the mother would have been relieved.

The more they heard about the possibility of Pershing's force going forward to take a place in the fighting line, and coming to hand-grips with the German foe, the greater grew the temptation to stay and witness the glorious sight. When Old Glory fluttered amidst the smoke and bursting bombs, and those khaki-clad men who had come up from the torrid deserts of Mexico hurled themselves upon the green-gray hosts of the Kaiser, what Yankee cheers and rebel yells would tell the world how America had commenced to accomplish the task of crushing the last stronghold of autocracy!

Whether Jack and Amos would overcome this

terrible temptation, and sail with little Pauline for home, or, yielding to the impulse for further adventure, decide to remain and once more join Pershing in the field, must remain for the present an unsolved question. But if it happened that they concluded to stay in France so as to be on hand when Uncle Sam's boys struck their first heavy blow for democracy, be sure that, in a succeeding volume, we shall take great pleasure in telling our young readers all the thrilling particulars.

THE END

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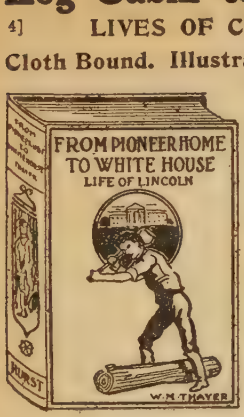


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